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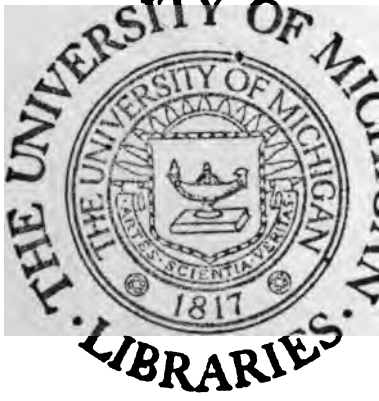
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by EDGAR SALTUS

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The Monster

I

WHEN the clergyman had gone, the bride turned.

Before her was an open window before which was the open sea. In the air was a tropical languor, a savour of brine, the scent of lilies, the sound of mandolins that are far away. Below, in the garden, were masses of scarlet, high heaps of geranium blooms. A bit beyond was the Caprian blue of the San Diego Bay. There, a yacht rode, white and spacious. The yacht belonged to her husband who was beside her. She turned again and as passionately he embraced her; she coloured.

For the moment, as they stood there, they seemed so sheerly dissimilar that they might have come of alien races, from different zones. He, with his fair hair, his fair skin, his resolute and aggressive face, was typically Anglo-Saxon. She, with her delicate features, her dense black hair, and disquieting eyes, looked

like a Madrilene Madonna—one of those fascinating and slightly shocking creations of seventeenth-century art that more nearly resemble infantas serenaded by caballeros than queens of the sky. There was a deeper contrast. He appeared frankly material; she, all soul.

Leisurely she freed herself.

"One might know," she began, then paused. A smile completed the sentence.

He smiled too.

"Yes, Leilah, one might know that however I hold you to me, I never can hold you enough."

"And I! I could be held by you forever."

On the door came a tap, rapid and assured. A page entered, the preoccupation of the tip in his face, in his hand a platter of letters.

The man, taking the letters, dismissed him.

"Miss Ogston," he continued. "From your father, confound him. It is the last time he will address you in that fashion. Miss Ogston," he repeated. "From the Silverstairs, I fancy. Gulian Verplank. There is but one for me."

He looked at his watch. "The launch from the yacht will be here shortly."

"When do we start?"

"Whenever you like. The Marquesas will

keep. Bora-Bora will be the same whenever we get there. Only——"

"Only what?"

"I am in love with you, not with hotels."

"Let us go then. There will be a moon tonight?"

"A new one, a honeymoon, a honeymoon begun."

"Gulian! As if it could end!"

In pronouncing the "u" in his name her mouth made the sketch of a kiss.

"You would not wish it to?" he asked.

"When I die, perhaps, and even then only to be continued hereafter. Heaven would not be heaven without you."

She spoke slowly, with little pauses, in a manner that differed from his own mode of speech, which was quick and forceful.

Verplank turned to the letter that had been addressed to him, and which he still held. Without opening it, he tore it into long, thin strips. It was, he knew from the imprint, a communication of no importance; but, at the moment, the action seemed a reply to her remark. It served to indicate his complete indifference to everything and everyone save her only. Afterward, with a regret that was to be eternal, she wished he had done the same with hers.

Yet, pleased at the time, she smiled.

"Gulian, you do love me, but I wonder do you love me as absolutely as I love you?"

Verplank, with a gesture that was familiar to him, closed and opened a hand.

"I do not know. But while I think you cannot love me more wholly than I love you, I do know that to me you are the unique."

Leilah moved to where he stood.

"Gulian, and you to me. You are the only one." She moved closer. Raising her hands, she put them on his shoulders. "Tell me, shall you be long away?"

"An hour or two. Apropos, would you care to leave before dinner?"

"Yes."

"We will dine on board, then. Is there anything in particular you would like?"

"Yes, lilies, plenty of lilies; and pineapples; and the sound of your voice."

Lifting her hands from his shoulders to his face, she drew it to her own. Their lips met longly. With the savour of her about him, Verplank passed out.

Idly Leilah turned. Before her the sea lay, a desert of blue. Below, on the beach, it broke with a boom in high white waves which, in retreating, became faintly mauve. The spectacle charmed her. But other scenes effaced it;

sudden pictures of the Marquesas; the long flight southward; the brief, bright days; the nights that would be briefer still. Pleasurably for a while these things detained her. Idly again she turned.

On the table were the letters. One was from an intimate friend, Violet Silverstairs, a New York girl who had married an Englishman, and who since then had resided abroad. The other was—or appeared to be—from Matlack Ogston.

Matlack Ogston was Leilah's father. That a father should write to a daughter is only natural. But that this father should write surprised her, as already it had surprised Verplank. When he mentioned whom the letter was from she had thought he must be in error. Now, as she opened it, she found that he had been. Her father had not written. The envelope contained a second envelope addressed to another person. This envelope had formerly been sealed and since been opened. It held three letters in an unknown hand.

She began at one of them. More exactly, she began, as some women do begin, at the end. The signature startled. At once, as she turned to the initial sentences, she experienced the curious and unenviable sensation of falling from an inordinate height, and it was not with

any idea that the sensation would cease, but rather with the craving to know, which in certain crises of the emotions becomes more unendurable than any uncertainty can be, that she read the rest of the first letter; after it, the second letter, and the third.

Then, as truth stared at her and she at truth, so monstrous was its aspect that, with one shuddering intake of the breath, life withered within her, light vanished without.

When ultimately, without knowing who she was; when, conscious only of an objective self struggling in darkness with the intangible and the void, when then life and light returned, she was on the floor, the monster peering at her.

She disowned it, disavowed it. But beside her on the floor the letters lay. There was its lair. It had sprung from them, and always from them it would be peering at her, driving her mad with its blighting eyes, unless——

She got on her hands and knees, and from them to her feet. Her body ached from the fall, and her head was throbbing. With the idea that smelling salts, or some cologne water which she had, might help her, she went and fetched them from an adjoining room. They were not of much use, she found, though presently she could think more clearly, and in a

little while she was considering the possibility that had loomed.

In certain conditions the soul gets used to monsters. It makes itself at home with what it must. Her soul, she thought, might also. But even as she thought it, she knew she never could. She knew that even were she able to succeed in blinding herself to this thing by day, at night it would crawl to her, sit at her side, pluck at her sleeve, wake her, and cry: "Behold me!"

It would cry it at her until she cried it at him. Then inevitably it would kill her.

She had been seated, bathing her head with cologne. Now fear, helplessness, the consciousness of both possessed her. They impelled her to act. She stood up. She looked about the room. Filled with flowers and sunshine, it said nothing. Beyond was the sea. It called to her. It told her that in a rowboat she could drift and be lost. It told her that that night she could throw herself from the yacht. The blue expanse, the high white waves, the little mauve ripples invited.

The room, though, with its flowers and sunshine, deterred. To throw herself from the yacht meant that she would have to wait. It meant more. It meant that she would have to see him. It meant that she would have to

feign and pretend. These things she could not do.

There remained the rowboat. Yet, in some way, now, the sea seemed less inviting. At the thought of its embrace and of its depths she shrank. To die, to cease any more to be, to succumb like the heroines of the old tragedies to fate, at the idea of that, her young soul revolted. There must be some other course.

She looked from the window. Beneath, before the ocean, a motor was passing. The whirr of it prompting, flight occurred to her, an escape to some spot that would engulf her as surely as the waves. Hesitatingly she considered it. But there was nothing else. Moreover, if she were to go, she must go at once.

She turned, crossed the room, stooped, gathered the letters, and seated herself at the table. There she put the letters in another envelope which she addressed to Verplank. While writing his name, her hand trembled, it shook on the paper drops of ink. These she tried to blot, and made a smear.

Trembling still, she got up, went to the telephone, and attempted to speak. At first, too overcome to do so, she leaned against the wall. It did not seem possible that she could do this thing. But she must, she knew. At last, with an effort, she spoke.

"When does the next train leave San Diego? One moment. Have my servants sent to me; my servants, yes, and—and order a motor."

Again she leaned against the wall. The room had become intolerable. Into the languors of the air a suffocation had entered, and it was unconsciously, in a condition semi-somnambulistic that she found herself considering the pink of the ceiling, then the rose-leaves woven in the green of the carpet, the dull red of the table-cover, the darker red of a tassel, the tall vase that stood on the table and in which were taller lilies.

There, beneath them was the monster. Its vibrations, disseminating through the room, were silhouetted on the walls. She could not see them, but she could feel them. They choked her.

But now her servants appeared. Nervously, with an irritability so foreign to her, that they eyed each other uncertainly, she gave them hurried commands. These obeyed and the porters summoned, she passed, choking still, from this room, the secrets of which the walls detained.

It was perhaps preordered that they should do so. Long later, in looking back, she realised that destiny then was having its say with

her, and realised also why. At the time, however, she was ignorant of two incidents, which, after the fashion of the apparently insignificant, subsequently became the reverse.

One incident had the porters for agent; the other was effected by a maid who supervened. The porters, in removing the luggage, collided with the table. The inkstand, the tall vase with the taller lilies, were upset; the vase, spilling water and flowers, fell broken on the floor; from the stand, ink rippled on the red of the cloth, on the darker red of the tassels, on the envelope which Leilah had directed to Verplank. These things, a maid, summoned by the crash, removed.

When Verplank returned, the table was bare.

He did not notice. What he alone noticed was Leilah's absence. She is below, he told himself. Then precisely as she had summoned her servants, he summoned his.

"Roberts," he said presently to a man. "Find Mrs. Verplank. Then get my things together. We start at once."

For a moment the man considered the master. At once civilly but stolidly he spoke:

"Mrs. Verplank has gone, sir."

Verplank, who had turned on his heel, turned back.

"What?"

"The hotel is full of it, sir. When I found that Mrs. Verplank was leaving, I——"

"What!" Verplank, in angry amazement, repeated.

"Mrs. Verplank is taking the limited, sir. It was the clerk who told me."

Then, for a moment, the master considered the man. At the simple statement his mind had become like a sea in a storm. A whirlwind tossed his thoughts.

But Leilah was still too near, her caresses were too recent for him to be able to realise that she had actually gone, and the fact that he could not realise it disclosed itself in those words which all have uttered, all at least before whom the inexplicable has sprung:

"It is impossible!"

"Yes, sir, it does seem most unusual."

Verplank had spoken less to the man than to himself, and for a moment stood engrossed in that futilest of human endeavours, the effort to read a riddle of which the only Œdipus is time.

At once all the imaginable causes that could have contributed to it danced before him and vanished. He told himself that Leilah's disappearance might be an attempt at some hide-and-go-seek which shortly would end.

But he knew her to be incapable of such nonsense. Immediately he decided that his servant was in error, and that she was then on the yacht. If not, then, clearly she had gone mad, or else——

But there are certain hypotheses which certain intellects decline to stomach. Yet the letter from her father recurring to him, he did consider the possibility that she might have gone because of some secret of his bachelor life. Anything may be distorted. Unfolded by her father, these secrets, which in themselves were not very dark, might be made to look infernal, and could readily be so made by this man who was not only just the one to do it, but who would have an object in so doing. Always he had been inimical to Verplank, and this, the abandoned bridegroom then felt, not on his account, but because of his father.

The latter, Effingham Verplank, had been a great catch, and a great beau. His charm had been myrrh and cassia—and nightshade, as well—to many women, among others to an aunt of Leilah, Hilda Hemingway, whose husband had called him out, called him abroad, rather, where the too charming Verplank waited until Hemingway fired, and then shot in the air. He considered that the gentlemanly thing to do. He was, perhaps, cor-

rect. But perhaps, too, it was hardly worth while to go abroad to do it. Yet, however that may be, the attitude of the injured husband, while no doubt equally correct, was less debonair. He obtained a divorce.

The matter created an enormous scandal, in the sedater days when New York society was a small and early family party and scandals were passing rare. But, like everything else, it was forgotten, even, and perhaps particularly by the parties directly concerned. Hemingway married again; the precarious Hilda married also; the too charming Verplank vacated the planet, and his widow went a great deal into the world.

This lady had accepted the scandal, as she had accepted many another, with a serenity that was really beautiful. But, then, her seductive husband had always seemed to her so perfectly irresistible, so created to conquer, that—as their son afterward found it necessary to explain—it no more occurred to her to sit in judgment on his victims, than it occurred to her to sit on him. With not only philosophic wisdom, but in the true spirit of Christian charity, she overlooked it all.

The culminant episode in the matter—the death of the volatile Verplank—took place at an hour when his son was too young to be more

than aware that his father had been taken away in a box. Leilah was even less advanced. It was years before she learned of her aunt's delinquencies. When she did, that lady had also passed away, as had previously passed a child of hers, one that, perhaps, did not belong to her first husband, and, certainly not to her second, the result being that, in default of other heirs, she left a fortune to Leilah, whose mother had left her another.

When her mother died, Leilah was in the nursery. Her father, who thereafter abandoned her to servants and governesses, she seldom saw. When she did see him, he ignored her completely. It was a way he had. He ignored also and quite as completely the son of the deadly Verplank.

To make up for it, or it may be to make trouble, the boy's mother never regarded Leilah otherwise than with that smile of sweet approbation with which she gratified all the world—all the world, that is, save those only who were not in hers. Among the gratified were the Arlington girls, two beauties, of whom the elder, Violet, was Leilah's closest friend.

It was at Newport, at Violet's wedding to Silverstairs, a young Englishman who had followed her from Europe, and who at once

took her back there; it was at this ceremony, in which Leilah participated as bridesmaid, and Verplank as best man, it was then that both became aware of a joint desire. It seemed to them that they were born to love each other, to love always, forever. Forever!—in a world where all things must end, and do. But the eagerness of it was upon them. Leilah wrote to her father. Verplank wrote to him also.

Matlack Ogston ignored Verplank's letter as invariably he had ignored Verplank. His daughter's he promptly returned. Across it was scrawled one word. That word was No.

Interests more commonplace had meanwhile transported Verplank from Newport to San Francisco. Informed of the veto, which to Leilah was an incentive and to him an affront, he had wired her to meet him at Coronado, this resort in Southern California which together they had been preparing to leave.

The night previous, on a yacht chartered at the Golden Gate, Verplank had arrived. It was by train, the next morning, that Leilah had come. The wedding followed. Before them lay a world of delight.

This was hardly an hour since. Now, like a bubble, abruptly that world had burst.

Yet why?

In that query was the riddle which impo-

tently Verplank was trying to solve. With a clutch at a possible solution, he turned to his servant:

"Roberts, get a motor. If Mrs. Verplank is not on the yacht, I will take a special, and follow her."

"Yes, sir. Shall you wish me to go with you?"

"No, stay here until you hear from me. At any moment Mrs. Verplank may return."

But Leilah did not return. Nor did the special, in which Verplank followed, overtake her. The first intelligence of her that reached him was the announcement of her engagement to another man.

II

IN Paris, many moons later, an Englishman, Howard Tempest, looked in, at the Opéra, on his cousin, Camille de Joyeuse. This lady, connected by birth with Britannia's best, and, through her husband, with the Bourbons, delighted the eye, the ear, and the palate. In appearance, she suggested certain designs of Boucher; in colouring and in manner, the Pompadour. Admirable in these respects, she was admired also, for her gayety, her tireless smile, and her chef. She had one of the best cooks in Paris—that is to say, in the world. Her husband, the Duc de Joyeuse, harmonised very perfectly with her. He had a head, empty, but noble, an air vaguely Régence. A year younger than herself, Time had had the impertinence to whiten his hair. The duchess was forty-two. Those unaware of the fact fancied her twenty-eight. The error greatly gratified this lady, who, familiarly, was known as Muffins.

One evening in May, Tempest entered her box, saluted her, examined the house, and, as, in a crash of the orchestra, the curtain fell,

seated himself, in response to a gesture, beside her.

Camille de Joyeuse turned to him, and with that smile of hers, said: "Do not fail to come on Sunday, Howard. There is to be a Madame Barouffska, whom I want you to meet. She was formerly a Mrs. Verplank. Barouffski is Number Two."

"Verplank! Barouffski! What barbarous names!" Tempest exclaimed. He had vivid red hair, violent blue eyes, and a great scarlet cicatrix that tore one side of his face. In spite of the severity of his evening clothes, he looked rather barbarous himself. "What was she, a widow?"

"Yes, but with no tombstone to show. It appears that she was in love with Verplank for years, married him one minute and left him the next."

Tempest stifled a yawn. "How extremely fastidious!"

"She ran away, got a divorce, met Barouffski and married him."

"Very honourable of her, certainly. From what pond did you fish her?"

"The Silverstairs'. Violet Silverstairs is an American you know——"

"Know! I should say I did know. Though, if I did not, I would take my oath to it. It's

got so a fellow can't stir without running into one of them. How does Louis like her?"

Louis was the duke.

The duchess displayed her beautiful false teeth. "Oddly enough, when he was in the States, he went hunting with her Number One."

"In the Rockies?" Tempest, with sudden interest, inquired. "In the Dakotas?"

"I fancy so. It was a place called, let me see; yes, Long Island, I think. I remember, he said it was very jolly."

Tempest tossed his red head. "Her Number Two, I suppose, is that chap I have seen at the Little Club. The Lord knows how he got there. He looks like a thimblerigger."

The duchess raised her opera-glass. "Possibly. Nowadays, so many men do, don't you think? There is Marie de Fresnoy with the Helley-Quetgens! You will have her next to you on Sunday, Howard. Do not lacerate her tender heart."

At the suggestion, Tempest made a face. His expression amused Camille de Joyeuse. Indulgently she added: "To make up for it you shall take Madame Barouffska out."

But now the curtain was rising. The clear brilliance of the house faded into a golden gloom.

On the Sunday following, when Tempest reached the Cours la Reine, in which his cousin resided, there was a motor before the perron, and from it a woman was alighting. As rhythmically, with a grace that is rare in women who are not ballerines, she mounted the stair, Tempest had a vision of a figure, tall and slight, of a mass of black hair, and of a neck emerging from ermine. In the anteroom above, while a servant took from her her cloak and another received Tempest's hat and coat, he saw that she was extremely beautiful.

Immediately a footman, throwing open a door, announced: "Madame la comtesse Barouffska!" He added at once: "Lord Howard Tempest!"

In this marriage of their names they entered a drawing room in which were the Joyeuses, the Fresnoys, the Silverstairs; others, also, who momentarily were indistinguishable. The room—large, wide, high-ceiled—was decorated gravely, with infinite taste. Beyond it, a suite of salons extended.

Camille de Joyeuse, advancing to meet her guests, presented Tempest to Mme. Barouffska.

In a voice which, if a trifle high, was fluted, the duchess added:

"My dear, this cousin of mine has a terrible

reputation, and that, I am sure, will commend him to you."

With the semblance of a smile, Mme. Barouffska replied:

"You know I am never quite able to decide just what construction to put on your remarks."

"Put the worst, put the worst!" answered the duchess, whose costume left her splendidly nude. From a billowy corsage her shoulders and bust emerged as though rising through foam, while the light gold tissue of her gown accentuated the royal outlines of her figure.

Leilah Barouffska, slenderer, taller, wholly in white, contrasted etherially with her. Turning to Tempest she said:

"Lord Howard, I have heard so much that is interesting about you."

"Not from Muffins, then."

"Yes, but also from Silverstairs. He told me that you are the best gentleman jockey in England and a Sanskrit scholar besides."

"Oh, I can straddle a horse, if it comes to that, but otherwise he exaggerates. He has caught that from his wife—unless it happens to be from her sister."

At mention of the girl, Leilah, who had been looking across the room, turned to Tempest again. In looking she saw this young

woman whose allurements—and possibilities—were generally regarded as excessive. Recently she had become engaged—perhaps for the tenth time. Coincidentally was the announcement that she was going in for light opera. Now, in reference to her, Leilah said:

"You have met Aurelia, then?"

"I found it very difficult not to."

"And this young Lord Buttercups to whom she is engaged, is he nice?"

Tempest adjusted his monocle. "Very. A trifle wrong in the upper story. So was his father. So was his grandfather. A fine old English family."

Faintly, as before, Leilah smiled. "I understand that Aurelia is studying for the stage. Such a queer idea, don't you think—for an American heiress, I mean."

Tempest, extracting his eyeglass, nodded. "Nowadays, unless an idea is queer, it can hardly be called an idea at all. But I am glad this young person is studying something. When she went to school she must have been taught everything which it is easiest to forget."

A servant announced:

"His Excellency, Mustim Pasha!"

The man who entered was short and stout. He had a full black beard, and the appearance, slightly Hebraic, which Turks possess.

After M. de Joyeuse had greeted him, he saluted the duchess.

Beyond, on a sofa, Violet Silverstairs sat talking to the Baronne de Fresnoy, a young woman who looked very much as might a statuette of Tanagra, to which Grévin had given two big blue circles for eyes, and a small pink one for mouth, but a statuette articulated, perhaps, by Eros, and costumed, certainly, by the Rue de la Paix—though a shade less artistically than Lady Silverstairs, who always seemed to have just issued from some paradise inhabited solely by poet-modistes, and who, in addition, possessed what Mme. de Fresnoy lacked, a face delicately and rarely patrician.

Adjacently was her sister, Aurelia, a girl with a face like an opening rose, and a frock of such astonishing simplicity that it looked both virginal and ruinous. This young person had the loveliest eyes imaginable. In them and about an uncommonly bewitching mouth was an expression quite ideally ingénue which, when least expected, it amused her to transform into one of extreme effrontery.

On one side of her was Lord Buttercups, an English youth, small, snubnosed, stupid. On the other lounged a Roman, Prince Farnese, a remarkably fine-looking pauper.

Turning from the girl's sister to the Turk, the young baroness called:

"Here, Musty, come and make love to us."

The Asiatic was about to abandon Mme. de Joyeuse, when doors at the farther end of the room were thrown open, and the duchess put a hand on his arm.

At table, Tempest, who had taken Leilah Barouffska out, found his seat indicated beside her. At his left was Mme. de Fresnoy, whom he detested. He turned to the American. At the moment some preoccupation, a nostalgia or a regret, contracted the angle of her mouth. The contraction gave her the expression which those display who have deeply suffered either from some long malady or from some perilous constraint.

Mechanically, Tempest considered a dish which a footman, his hands gloved in silk, was presenting. When he again turned to the American, it was as though a curtain had fallen or risen. Her face had lighted, and it was with an entirely worldly air that she put before him this unworldly question:

"Do you believe in fate?"

Tempest laughed. "Not on an empty stomach. I believe then in nothing but virtue."

Leilah put down her spoon. "It seems to

me that our lives are sketched in advance. It may be that we have the power to amplify incidents or to curtail them, but the events themselves remain unchanged. They are there in our paths awaiting us. Though why they are there——"

As was usual with her, she spoke with little pauses, in a voice that caressed the ear. Now she stopped and raised the spoon, in which was almond soup.

Tempest took a sip of Madeira. "A pal of mine, a chap I never met for a number of reasons, though particularly, I suppose, because he died two thousand years ago, well, he told me that we should wish things to be as they are. I have no quarrel with fate. But if you have, or do have——"

A maître d'hôtel, after presenting a carp that had been arranged as though swimming in saffron, was supervising its service.

"Padapoulos," exclaimed the young Baronne de Fresnoy, whom the sight of the fish had, perhaps, excited, "Padapoulos told me that he dined best on an orchid soup, a mousse of aubergine, and the maxims of Confucius."

"Padapoulos," the legate of the Sublime Porte gravely commented, "is a poet, and a Greek. Add those two things together, and you get—you get——"

"Nothing to eat!" the young baroness, with an explosion of little laughs, threw at him. "Musty!" she cried. "Whom were you with at the Variétés last night? I saw you. Yes, I did. Oh, Musty, who would have thought that you would be unfaithful to me!"

"These Roumis!" the Turk mentally exclaimed. "If a wife of mine talked in that way I would have her impaled."

Beyond, across an opulent bosom, de Joyeuse and Silverstairs were talking sport. They delighted in things that men have always loved, the pursuit of prey, the joy of killing, the murderous serenity of the woods.

Farther up was Aurelia. As before, she had Buttercups on one side, Farnese on the other. She poked at the former.

"That horrid de Fresnoy woman is trying to flirt with you, Parsnips. Now, don't deny it. I don't blame her. You are too good-looking. When we are married—if we ever are—I'll make you wear a veil. You sha'n't go out except in a closed carriage. Yes, and with some big, fat, strapping woman to look after yo

Beatifically the youth considered her. "Couldn't you do that?"

Delicately Aurelia raised a fork. "I shall have my own affairs to attend to." For a sec-

ond she nibbled. "I have a few on my hands as it is."

Buttercups stabbed at his plate. "I, too, may have business of my own."

"Business! Business!" The girl repeated. "You are so commercial—just like all the nobility. If you were not a peer you would be mistaken for one. It's quite painful."

"That may b-be," Buttercups spluttered. "But this idea of yours of going on the stage is quite as p-painful to me."

He hesitated, then, as though uttering a great moral truth, threw out:

"It's so dreadful to have your name in the papers!"

"And still more dreadful not to!" the girl threw back. She turned to Farnese. "You do nothing but eat!"

With large, melancholy, inconstant eyes the Italian looked at her. "It is my one consolation since you became engaged to that imbecile."

Aurelia pecked at her food. "One always feels quite safe with an imbecile, and that is so restful. Try it and see."

"I'd like to try it with you."

Aurelia put down her fork. "Am I your idea of an imbecile? You are flattering, if insincere."

Again the Roman covered her with his eyes. "It is rather difficult to be the one and not the other. But I am perfectly sincere in saying that you are my idea of perfection."

"Thanks, but, then, you are not mine."

"And might one ask what yours is?"

Dreamily, with an air of innocence that was infinite, Aurelia looked at him. "You will think it childish of me, perhaps, but, like all young girls—like all young and inexperienced girls—I have an ideal. A mere maiden's fancy, no doubt, and yet one which I cherish so. It is a vision which at times I have of a blind man, a deaf mute, a divine creature, invalid and octogenarian, who would not know what I did and would not care."

Pausing, she dropped her eyes and sadly shook her head. "You will tell me that he don't exist."

"He might be manufactured," Farnese cheerfully replied.

Then he, too, paused, drank of the wine before him, and, perhaps stimulated by it, whispered:

"Believe me, I feel as though I could cut my throat for you."

Maliciously Aurelia looked up. "When a man does not feel that way he has no feeling at

all. One might even say that he is quite heartless."

Across the table, Tempest, turning again to Leilah, said: "Monsieur Barouffski is not here to-night."

At the remark, instantly in her face its former expression of constraint appeared.

"No, he is to join us later."

At the other end, where the duchess sat, everybody was laughing. The lady had been giving an account of a recent bankruptcy, that of Lord Auld Reekie.

"Heavens!" Violet Silverstairs exclaimed. "What will become of Bobbles!"

Bobbles was Lady Auld Reekie, a fair young craft of light timber and many sails.

Camille de Joyeuse, summoning her diligent smile, replied: "She will go into the hands of a receiver."

Another jest followed, and presently, in the contagion of it almost the entire table joined.

The delicately toxic fare, the slightly emotionalising wines, loosened tongues, robbing them of discretion, and, before the servants, as though the latter were deaf and dumb, hosts and guests revealed their naked minds.

"It is rotten to talk in that way before these men," Tempest exclaimed. "They get their

wages with lessons in anarchy thrown in. It's too much."

"I had not heard," Leilah replied. "I was thinking of that friend of yours whom you never met."

Tempest laughed. "The one who said we should wish things to be as they are? Ah, well! I am afraid I am not up to that yet."

"Nor I. But who was he, if one may ask? Not Aristotle?"

"No, but, by the way, do you know whom Aristotle is supposed to be, or rather to have become? Herbert Spencer! An occultist told me. He told me also such a curious story. You have heard, have you not, of Apollonius of Tyana? Then you may remember it is said of him that he healed the sick, raised the dead, knew all things save the caresses of women, and spoke every language including that of colours. Well, the occultist told me that Jesus was a rabbi who surrendered his entity to the Christ, and afterward reappeared here as Apollonius. He said, too, that he was not crucified. Crucifixion, you know, is merely the symbol of initiation."

"And whom did he say was the Christ?"

"An envoy from a higher sphere."

Leilah inclined her head. "Yes, and there

have, I believe, been others. From zeniths or from nadirs unknown to us, from planes, let us say, where all beatitudes are as usual as all shames are common here, spirits commissioned to regenerate the hearts of man pass into the slums of space. Confident, with a crown of light they come, only to return with one of thorns."

Tempest turned squarely in his chair. "That is a singularly beautiful idea!"

Again Leilah inclined her head. "It is beautiful. It is beautiful to think that earthward from some chromatic star the soul of Krishna may have sunk. But the idea is not mine. I found it in the *Vidyâ.*"

This last statement was lost. Mme. de Fresnoy was insisting on Tempest's attention. Meanwhile a cygnet, its plumage replaced, a pond lily in its ochre beak, had been presented, carved and served. A salad, known as Half-Mourning, a composition of artichoke hearts and Piedmontese truffles, had departed with it. Now sweets had come, pastry light as a caress, volatile as an essence, that pastry of which the art is known only to the Oriental and the occasional cordon bleu.

Devoutly, with an air of invoking the Prophet, the Turk was absorbing it.

The young Baronne de Fresnoy, abandon-

ing Tempest, looked at him. With a wicked glitter in her big blue eyes she called:

"Musty! Are you thinking of me?"

The pasha was framing a reply, a reply perhaps rather bald, when Camille de Joyeuse also addressed him. Presently she stood up. The others imitated her. The gayeties of the table were abandoned for the brilliance of the salons beyond.

Tempest, who had accompanied Leilah Barouffska said, as she seated herself:

"Are you to remain in Paris?"

Before answering, she looked up at him, for he was standing. "Who can tell what one will do? But I fancy so. We have taken a house in the rue de la Pompe."

"In the rue de la Pompe!" Tempest exclaimed. "That is where I live." He smiled. The fact that they were neighbours seemed to constitute a bond. "Whereabouts in the rue de la Pompe?"

"Next to the church."

"Do you find it convenient?"

A servant announced:

"Monsieur and madame Spencer-Poole!"

"You mean," Leilah replied, "am I a Catholic? No, I am an Episcopalian. But my views, I fear, are not orthodox. I have got so far that I believe fully in the *Vidyâ.*"

She had cited the book at the dinner table but, at the time, distracted by Marie de Fresnoy, Tempest had not heard; now he exclaimed at it.

"The *Vidyâ!* Of all things! Why not the Upanishads?"

A servant announced:

"Madame la marquise de Charleroi!"

Leilah made a little gesture. "The Upanishads, too. I have great faith in them also. Their conceptions seem to me the most perfect that the human mind has evolved, that is, if it were a human mind that evolved them."

A servant announced:

"Madame la princesse Orlonna!"

"What particularly impressed you in them?" Tempest asked.

"The demonstration that life is a laboratory in which the strength of the soul is tried."

"And in the *Vidyâ?*"

"The fact that selfishness is the root of evil. That impressed me very much, primarily I suppose because it is true, but chiefly I think because I had not realized it before."

Tempest nodded. Never had he heard a mondaine cite the Upanishads. In no drawing room had he ever heard the *Vidyâ* mentioned. In his life he had not dreamed of having a

digest of each produced in an atmosphere dripping with frivolities. As he nodded he reconsidered this woman. From the first he had realized that she differed from the ordinary society type. Now he saw that she belonged to a superior world.

"Do you not admire them, too?" Leilah, who had also been considering him, inquired.

Tempest adjusted his monocle. "You see, you know, the Self, the All-Self, the One, the oneness of self with everything, the oneness of all things with One, these minor motifs of theirs I may admire but I do not grasp. On the contrary, there is a certain voluminous complexity about them that makes me gasp. None the less they advance certain ideas which, while curious to the few and to the many absurd, are yet so mathematically evident; the fact for instance——"

A servant announced:

"His Highness monseigneur le prince Paul de Montebianco!"

"Monsieur Harris!"

The salons were becoming filled. The floor was swept by trains brief but brilliant. There was a multiplication of black coats, a renewed animation, a mounting murmur in which occasionally the name of a new arrival was lost.

The servant announced:

"Monsieur le vicomte and madame la vicomtesse de Helley-Quetgen!"

"Madame la princesse Zubaroff!

"Monsieur d'Arcy!"

"Monsieur le comte Barouffski!"

The last of these, a large man, very fair, with grey-green eyes, had a studied manner which, however, his voice relieved. As he advanced and addressed Mme. de Joyeuse, it sounded supple and silken, as indeed most Slav voices do.

Already groups had formed. The corner in which Tempest stood before Leilah developed another. The Spencer-Pooles approached. With them was d'Arcy, a young man abominably good looking, famous for the prodigious variety of his affairs.

Tempest who had continued talking, who had even been expounding and who now felt that he had been holding forth, moved on. He wanted to smoke and being an habitué of the household, he knew where the smoking room was.

There, before an open fire, his hands behind his back, in that after-dinner attitude which some men assume, M. de Joyeuse stood. He was telling of a stag hunt that had been held at Monplaisir, his estate.

The duke was not an impressionist, his des-

cription lacked colour. But de Fresnoy, who had been present, resaw it all; the sheen of the horses, the green of the whippers-in, the pink coats of the sportsmen, the blue dolmans of the officers that had ridden over from a garrison near by, the verdure of the forest's edge, the view, the scramble, the run, the quarry, the hallali of the huntsman, the leaping hounds, the fastidious ceremonial of the death and the sky of pale silk which draped with faint gold the magnificent brutality of the scene.

"It was just my luck to have missed it," Silverstairs threw in.

De Joyeuse turned to him. "We count on you next autumn. And on you also, mon vieux," he added to Tempest who had approached.

Tempest nodded. He was lighting a cigar. The operation concluded, he drew a chair beside Silverstairs. "Now tell me all about Madame B."

Silverstairs eyed him quizzingly. "She interests you?"

"Enormously."

"Then look out for Barouffski whom she interests still more."

Tempest shrugged his shoulders. "Was it her interest in Number One or Number One's interest in her that declined?"

"You mean Verplank?"

"I suppose I do. Anyway I mean her first husband. Why were they divorced?"

"Why? But my dear Tempest, divorce in the States is what racing is with us, a national amusement. Everybody takes a hand in it."

"The right or the left?"

"Both I fancy. Though in the case of Madame B. I have an idea that the right turned out to be wrong."

Tempest flicked the ashes from his cigar. "I may compliment you, Silverstairs. You have a manner of expressing yourself which is highly cryptic. But now, to an every day sort of chap like myself, would you mind being less abstruse?"

"I should feel sordid if I refused. Verplank is a very good sort, whereas this Barouffski is a rotter."

Tempest bowed. "Thank you for descending to my level. The long and short of it is that she has made a mess of it. Well, most people do. I don't wonder now that over the soup she talked about fate."

"Oh, as for that, after certain experiences of my own, with which, pray do not be alarmed, I have no intention of boring you, I have stopped wondering at anything at all."

"Silverstairs, in ceasing to be cryptic, do

not become Spartan. My cousin told me that Joyeuse hunted with this, with What's-his-name, with—er——"

"With Verplank?"

"Yes, that he had hunted with him in the States. And that reminds me. What have you decided about that horse?"

Silverstairs pulled at his straw-coloured moustache. "I'll let you know to-morrow. When are you to be at home?"

"Any time after two."

Silverstairs nodded. "Very good, I will drop in on you."

From beyond, blue and vibrant, came the upper notes of a violin. In the now crowded salons a Roumanian, the rage of the season, a youth, very pale, with melancholy eyes, flowing hair and the waist of a girl, was executing a fantasy of his own.

De Joyeuse flicked a speck from his sleeve, threw back his noble and empty head, gave a circular look of inquiry, a little gesture of invitation, and accompanied by his friends, sauntered to the rooms without.

There, Barouffski after saluting Mme. de Joyeuse had engaged her briefly in talk. But her attention had been attracted rather than claimed by the Montebiancan prince, a young man extremely gentlemanly and equally

modest who, with that diffidence which royals and poets share, stood bashfully at her side.

Barouffski, bowing again, passed on. During his short and entirely fragmentary conversation with Mme. de Joyeuse, his eyes had rummaged the room.

Leilah, meanwhile, rising from the sofa where she had been seated, moved with the inflammatory d'Arcy into the salon beyond.

Barouffski would have followed. But the young Baronne de Fresnoy addressed him. Perversely, with sudden glimpses of little teeth and an expression of glee in her piquant face, she asked:

"Was it you who performed that high act of gallantry at Longchamps to-day?"

"Was it I who did what?" Barouffski surprisedly exclaimed.

"What was it?" asked Aurelia, who with Buttercups in tow, had approached.

But Mme. de Fresnoy waved at her. "Go away my dear, it is not for an ingénue."

"Ah then, but you see," Aurelia indolently interjected, "I am tired of being an ingénue. An ingénue is supposed to be in a state of constant surprise and that is so exhausting."

None the less, with Buttercups still in tow she betook herself to a corner where she was promptly joined by Farnese.

Then at once to Barouffski, to Mustim Pasha, to the Helley-Quetgens, to others that stood about, the young baroness related a morsel of gossip, the report of which had been brought her but a moment before, a story that had one of the reigning demireps for heroine and for hero a man unidentified by the baronne's informant, the tale of an assault committed before all Paris, before all Paris that is, that happened to be at the races that day; an extravaganza in which the heroine, erupting suddenly on the pelouse before the Grand Stand, had, with her parasol, struck the hero over the head and had been about to strike him again, when he, pinioning her arms with his own, had to the applause of everybody, prevented the second assault by kissing her through her veil; after which releasing the lady, he had raised his hat and strolled away.

"Was it you, Barouffski?" Mme. de Fresnoy, the narrative at an end, inquired. "Was it?"

"I? Nonsense! Why should you ask?"

"It would be just like you, you know. Besides, I hear that the man was tall and good-looking."

"You are exceedingly complimentary. But the world is peopled with tall, good-looking men."

"Pas tant que ça," laughed the baroness. "Well, if it was not you, perhaps it was that man who is just coming in."

Involuntarily Barouffski turned, while a footman bawled:

"Monsieur Verplank!"

III

It was in circumstances which, if not dramatic, were, at least, uncommon, that Leilah Verplank met Barouffski.

At Los Angeles, after her flight from Coronado, she caught an express that would have taken her East. Even so, it could not take her from herself, it could not distance memory, it could not annihilate the past. The consciousness of that obsessed her. Each of her thoughts became a separate throb. About her head formed an iron band. Her body ached. She felt hot and ill. She had a sense of thirst, a sense, too, of fear.

In the compartment where she sat, a stranger came. She hid her face, covering it with her hands. The stranger sidled in between them, looked her in the eyes, penetrated them, permeated her, shook long shudders through her, shrieked at her: "I am Fright!"

She cried aloud. No one heard. She got to the door.

In the section immediately adjoining were her women. Perplexed at the start by her unaccountable flight and, since then, alarmed by

the abnormal excitability which she had displayed, both, at the sight of her then, rushed to her.

Salt Lake was the first possible asylum. There, weeks later, Leilah arose from one of those attacks, which, for lack of a better term, has been called brain fever.

Like fire, fever may consume, it does not necessarily obliterate. The past remained. But in that lassitude which fever leaves, Leilah was able to consider it with a wearied certainty that no immediate effort could be required of her then.

"Forget," some considerate and subliminal self admonished. "Forget."

Even in sleep she could not always do that. But though she could not forget the past, she could, she believed, barricade herself against it. The idea was suggested by the local sheet in which she found an item about neighbourly Nevada. The item hung a hammock for her thoughts, rested her mentally, unrolled a carpet for the returning steps of health.

Verplank, meanwhile, misdirected at Los Angeles, reached San Francisco. Learning there that a party of three women had, that morning, at the last moment, embarked on the Samoa packet; learning also that of these women the central figure projected, or seemed

to project, Leilah's silhouette, he wired for his yacht and sailed away in pursuit. But an accident supervening, the packet reached Samoa before him. When Verplank got there the boat was gone. Still in pursuit he started for the austral seas. There, the mistake discovered, hope for the time abandoned him and he landed in Melbourne, ignorant that the supremely surgical court of Nevada was amputating him from his wife.

In matters of this solemnity, the Nevada statutes require that one of the parties to the operation shall have resided for six months within the state. But at Carson, the capital, a town that has contrived to superpose the Puritan aspect of a New England village on the vices of a Malay port, in this city Leilah learned that statutes so severe were not enacted for such as she.

The information, tolerably consoling, was placed before her by a young Jew who, as she alighted from the train, divined her errand, addressed her with easy Western informality, put a card in her hand, offered his services, telling her as he did so that if she retained him he would have her free in no time, in three months, in less. It was a mere matter of money, he explained, and, what he did not explain, a mere matter of perjury as well, the

perjury of local oafs ready to swear to whatever they were paid for, ready to testify for instance that they had known anybody for any required length of time. But the Jew in divining Leilah's errand divined too her loyalty. In speaking of fees, he kept manœuvres and methods to himself.

Leilah, repelled yet beguiled, succumbed. The Jew was retained and in a wretched inn her things were unpacked. At once a rain of days began, long, loveless days in which she tried to starve her thoughts into submission and bear the cross that had been brought.

The effort was not very satisfactory. The reason why she should have a cross and why it should be borne had never even to her devout mind been adequately explained. Hitherto she had not required any explanation and not unnaturally perhaps since she had had no cross to bear. The dogma that she in common with the rest of humanity must suffer because of the natural propensities of beings that never were, she had accepted as only such dogmas can be accepted, on faith. But in the dismal solitudes of Carson, faith faded, the dogma seemed absurd.

Then suddenly that which in her ignorance she took to be chance, supplied a superior view. While waiting in a shop for a slovenly clerk to

do up a package, she looked at a shelf on which were some books—frayed, bedrabbled, second hand. Among them was a treatise on metallurgy, another on horse-breeding, a string of paper covered novels and the *Vidyâ*.

The title, which conveyed nothing, for that reason attracted. At random she opened the book. A paragraph sprang at her:

"From debility to strength, from strength to power, from power to glory, from glory to perfection, from plane to plane, in an evolution proceeding from the outward to the inward, from the material to the spiritual, from the spiritual to the divine, such is the destiny of the soul."

Leilah turned a page. Another paragraph leaped out.

"There is not an accident in our lives, not a sorrow, a misfortune, a catastrophe, a happiness that is not due to our own conduct in this existence or in a previous one. In accordance with the nature of our deeds there are thrown about us the tentacles of pain or the arms of joy."

But the slovenly clerk was approaching. Leilah closed the book, asked the price, paid for it, paid for the other purchase and went back to the inn where during the rest of the day she read the drama of the soul, the story of its emanation from the ineffable, of its surrender

to desire, of its fall into matter, of its birth and rebirth in the mansions of life which are death, of the persistence there of its illusory joys, of the recurrences of its unenlightening trials, until, at last, some memory returning of what it had been when it was other than what it had become, it learns at last to conquer desire and accomplish its own release.

The drama, however old, was new to Leilah, and at first not very clear. But beneath it was a chain of causality, the demonstration that this life is the sum of many others, the harvest after the sowing, and, joined to the demonstration were corollaries and deductions which showed that sorrow, when rightly viewed, is not a cross but a gift, a boon granted to the privileged.

It was a little before she mastered the idea. When she had, the novelty of it impressed. At the back of the *Vidyâ* was a list of cognate works. She wired to San Francisco for them. Shortly they came, and in their companionship the rain of long, loveless days fell by.

Ultimately she sat on a high chair. An oaf asked her questions. Others testified. On the morrow a paper was brought her. It had on it a large seal, the picture of a big building, words that were engrossed, others in script.

She was free.

The knowledge brought no exultation. It was a hostage to joy, one of the many that she was to give.

Meanwhile she had written to Violet Silverstairs telling her that she had separated from Verplank, and asking might she join her. The answer, which was cabled, told her to come. That day she started.

The town house of the Earls of Silverstairs is in Belgrave Square. There are worse places. But to the American countess the discomforts of the residence were not to be endured. After one season she declined to put up with them. Pending an entire modernisation of the house, she and Silverstairs migrated to Paris, where they took an apartment, and a very charming one, in the rue François Premier.

In this apartment Leilah was made to feel that she was with friends, one of whom, however, could not get over the fact that she could not get at the facts in the matter.

"See here, Leilah," Violet Silverstairs said aggrievedly, not once, but fifty times, "it is downright mean of you to keep me in the dark. What was it that he did? Tell me."

The lady had known Verplank, as she had known Leilah, ever since she had known anybody. They had grown up together. Though not related by blood, they were by choice,

which is sometimes thicker. In the circumstances it was perhaps but natural that she should call it mean, perhaps but human that she should be aggrieved.

The puzzle of the situation she put before her husband.

"What do you suppose it can be?" she asked.

But Silverstairs had no surmises to hazard.

"It must be something quite too dreadful," Violet continued. "One of those things, don't you know, that are said to change your whole life. She just sits about and reads queer books."

"Queer books!" Silverstairs surprisedly repeated.

"Yes, books that tell of planes and rounds and cycles and chains of lives and rebirths and redeaths. She believes in them, too. She told me so."

Silverstairs tugged at his moustache. "She might as well believe in the music of the spheres."

Violet looked at her lord. She loved him as certain delicately organized women do love men who are merely robust. But her affection did not warp her judgment. She know that within his splendid physique was a spirit, valiant perhaps, but obtuse.

"Well, why not?" she retorted. "Let a mi-

crophone receive from a steel plate the reflection of a star, and sounds are emitted, tones peculiar to the star itself. Those of the sun are blatant. Those of Arcturus are like little bells. Those of Sirius are as sobs from a zither. Everybody knows that. Why shouldn't she believe in the music of the spheres?"

"Gammon!" cried this man who at Eton and Christ Church had abundantly acquired everything which is most useless. "I never heard such rot."

"I dare say, but that is not the point. The point is that it is no joke to her."

Nor was it. Leilah at first refused to go anywhere, to see any one, to be present when there were guests. But Violet, declaring that she would have no moping in her diggings, forced her. It was very reluctantly that Leilah acceded. After a while she did so as a matter of course. Finally, as was inevitable, she accepted invitations elsewhere.

It was what Violet had aimed at, though not at all at the result. Yet that, Leilah, who had come to believe in karma, afterward regarded as fate.

Presently, it so fell about that at one dinner she had at her left a man whom she did not know, whose name she had not caught and with whom, during the preliminary courses,

she had not exchanged a word. As the dinner progressed, cigarettes were served. Twice she refused them. The second time, as she turned again to the man at her right, she heard a cry, across the table she saw a face, the eyes staring, the features elongated. At once there was an uproar, behind her there was a crash, she was torn bodily from her chair, a piece of tapestry had been thrown about her and in it she was rolled on the floor by the man whom she did not know.

Probably, at no dinner, anywhere, had a woman suffered such indignities. She was so telling herself when she realised, as she immediately did realise, that the man and others who had joined him, were but occupied in saving her life. Her dress had caught fire and it was in this flaming fashion, hurled on the floor by a stranger and there brutalised by him, that she made the acquaintance of Count Kasimiérz Barouffski.

The sack of her costume forced her to return to the rue François Premier, where at five o'clock the next day, Barouffski appeared. He appeared the day following, the day after, the day after that.

These attentions Violet Silverstairs viewed with suspicion.

"I verily believe," she said to Leilah, "that

it was that polecat who set you on fire, and if he did no one can convince me that he did not do it on purpose."

"Violet!"

"That's right, fly at me. I thought you would. Are you going to take him?"

In an elaborate drawing room in the rue François Premier the two women were having tea. Leilah, without replying, raised her cup.

Violet cocked an eye at her. "One would have thought that you had had enough of matrimony. But perhaps your intentions are not honourable."

Leilah reddened. "Violet!" she again exclaimed.

"My dear," Lady Silverstairs resumed, "remember that you are no longer in the States. England is the most hypocritical country in Europe. America is the most hypocritical country in the world. That is what we call progress. But France being old-fashioned and behind the times is not censorious. I admit, I used to be. But I am not censorious any longer. I am not because any such *état d'âme* while advanced is not becoming.

"I am an old married woman," added the lady who was not twenty-two. "But if I were not, if for instance I were like you, free, independent and not a fright, and I had to choose

between love and matrimony, it would not take me a moment to decide. Not one."

Leilah put down her cup. "Of course it would not. If you had it to do again you would marry Silverstairs and you would marry for love. That is over for me, over forever."

Narrowly, out of a corner of an eye, Violet considered her. "He was such a brute, was he?"

"Who? Gulian, do you mean?"

"I suppose so. There has been no other, has there?"

"Violet!"

It was at this juncture, for the fiftieth time, that Lady Silverstairs exclaimed:

"It is downright mean of you to keep me in the dark. What was it that happened? Make a soiled breast of it. Do!"

For the fiftieth time Leilah protested:

"Don't ask me. Don't. He knows and that is enough. As for me I am trying to forget."

"And you think Barouffski will help you. But has it ever occurred to you that if you were not very rich he might lack the incentive?"

To this Leilah assented. "He said he is poor."

"At least he does not exaggerate. I told Silverstairs that he was after you for your money and he said that was what he married me for. So he did and I married him for his title. It was a fair bargain. Now if we had it to do over I would say—I would say—well, I would say that it is better to have loved your husband than never to have loved at all. But six months hence, if you had it to do over, do you think you could say as much—or as little?"

"At least I could say that I did not marry for a title."

"Well, hardly, particularly a Polish one, though I daresay even that might be useful in the servants' hall. But what could you say you married for? It isn't love?"

"No."

"Nor position?"

"No."

"Then what on earth——"

"Violet, how hard you make it for me. Can't you see that if I do, it will be for protection?"

"For protection! Merciful fathers! You talk like a chorus girl! Protection against what? Against whom? Verplank?"

"No." Leilah choking down something in her throat, replied: "Against myself."

"I don't understand you," said Violet

slowly. But she did or thought she did, and that night told Silverstairs that Leilah was still in love with her ex.

It was in these circumstances that Leilah listened to the Count Kasimiérz Barouffski, who, in telling her that he was poor, omitted to add that he had resources. These were women and cards. It is a business like another. But even to his nearest friends, to Tyszkiewicz, a compatriot, and Palencia, a Corsican, he did not boast of it. He had therefore some sense of shame, but not of honour, though with humour he was supplied. A man with some sense of humour and no sense of honour may go far. Barouffski intended to. After his volcanic introduction to Leilah, he beheld in her not the woman but the opportunity which chance had sent his way. To grasp that he displayed every art of which the Slav is capable. He did more. He impressed her not with the nobility of his name but of his nature. He was a good actor and though at first unsuccessful he was not discouraged. It was an axiom of his that among the dice of destiny there is always a golden six. It was axiomatic with him also that it is not tossed at once. To deserve it, one must wait. Barouffski waited. Presently fate shook the box before him. The golden six was his.

But not the box.

To Leilah the mere idea of matrimony was abhorrent. Yet she could not stop indefinitely with the Silverstairs. She had no relatives with whom she could reside. She felt that it would be awkward and perhaps equivocal for her to have an establishment of her own. But these considerations were minor beside another—a sense, haunting and constant, that the excursion to Nevada had been inadequate, that the past needed a surer barricade.

It was not a husband that she wanted. Peace and security were the flesh-pots that she craved. These Barouffski offered or seemed to—and it was these finally and these only that she agreed to accept.

To the implied stipulation Barouffski consented with an air of high chivalry but also with an ambiguous smile. Given the golden six of her income, the box was a detail to him, and it was in these circumstances that over the perhaps insecurely locked door of her past, this mask mounted guard.

The news of the engagement, filtering through the press, was cabled to the States, together with the fact that Leilah was then stopping in the rue François Premier with Lady Silverstairs, whose portrait, in addition to

bogus presentments of the engaged couple, were printed in the minor sheets that circulate from New York to San Francisco.

On arriving from Australia at the latter city, Verplank happened on a belated copy. Since he had gone from Coronado, this, the first news of his wife, was her engagement to another man.

In his amazement his thoughts stuttered. Into his mind entered stretches of night. He looked at the sheet without seeing it. But the paragraph and the purport of it, already photographed on the films of the brain, were prompting him unconsciously, and it was without really knowing what he was saying that he exclaimed:

"Leilah! My wife! In Paris! Engaged to another man!"

The names, the words, the meaning of them all, beat on his brain like blows of a hammer.

"Leilah! My wife! In Paris! Engaged!"

Again he looked at the sheet. "What a damned lie!" he ragingly cried, and, rumpling the paper, threw it from him.

But now, the names, the words, the meaning of them all, well beaten into him, readjusted themselves, presenting a picture perfectly defined and possibly real.

He stooped, gathered the paper, smoothed it, read the account again.

After all, he reflected, it might be that she was in Paris and, if there, it was natural that she would be with Violet Silverstairs. These two items were, therefore, not improbably correct. That view reached, the deduction followed: If they are correct, the other may be. Yet, in that case, he argued, obviously she must think me dead. On the heels of this second deduction an impression trod—the ease and dispatch with which she had become consoled.

Enraged at once, angered already by what he had taken for a lie and then infuriated by what he took for truth, the anterior incidents that had this supreme outrage for climax, leaped at him. At the onslaught the primitive passions flared, and it was with the impulse of the homicide that he determined to seek and overwhelm this woman who accepted men and matters with such entire sans-gêne.

On the morrow he left for New York. Before going he sent a cablegram to the address which the paper had supplied:

Am just apprised of the studied insult of your engagement to some foreign cad. Leaving for Paris at once.

As he signed it, deeply, beneath the breath, he swore. "That will show her," he added.

It so happened that it showed her nothing. Leilah was not then in the rue François Premier, but in the rue de la Pompe, where the message followed, but only to be received by Barouffski, who read it with a curious smile.

Already he hated Verplank, who had not yet acquired a hatred for him. But though that hatred had not been acquired, it developed tumultuously when, on arriving in New York, he learned that not merely the report of the engagement was true, but that the engagement had since resulted in a marriage, which itself had been preceded by a Nevada divorce.

In comparison to all that had occurred, the divorce seemed at the time almost negligible. It was the crowning infamy of this marriage which, in renewing the primitive passions, aroused in Verplank a determination not merely to seek and overwhelm the woman, but to seek and destroy the man. The marriage, he decided could be but the result of an anterior affair, there was no other explanation of it. The idea that had come to him at Coronado, the possibility that she might have left him because informed of some affair of his own and which since then he had examined again and again, fell utterly away. It was not because of errors of his that she had gone, but

for turpitudes of her own. Then to his anger at her was added a hatred of Barouffski, whom he had never seen, and who, without having seen Verplank, hated him also, hated him retrospectively and prospectively, hated him because clearly Leilah had been his and—where women are concerned, all things being possible —might be again.

But though Barouffski hated Verplank actively, he hated him vaguely, as one must when one hates the unknown. It was the cablegram which, in supplying the personal element, made the hate concrete.

"Foreign cad, eh?" he repeated, with a curious smile. "Eh bien, nous verrons, we shall see."

Presently the opportunity occurred. For it was in these circumstances, a fortnight after the receipt of the cablegram, that, directed by the young Baronne de Fresnoy, he turned and saw Verplank entering the room where he stood.

IV

With the unerring instinct of the man of the world, Verplank, on entering the crowded salon, divined immediately, among all the women present, the hostess whom he had never seen.

As he bent over her hand, the duchess, who had not an idea how he came there, said in her fluted voice:

"This is really so nice of you. I did not know you were in Paris."

"Nor did I—until this moment," answered Verplank, looking as he spoke into the eyes of his hostess who, after the one imperceptible glance with which the mondaine judges and classifies, was wondering in what manner, this man, with his virile face and impeccable presence, had forced Leilah Barouffska to leave him.

"But," he added, "Monsieur de Joyeuse whom I saw this afternoon told me that you would be at home, and assured me that I might venture to present my homages."

The duchess displayed her tireless smile. "I am only sorry not to have had them sooner."

She paused. Between her smile, the edges of her teeth showed, false but beautiful. "There is Lady Silverstairs trying to get you to look at her, and very well worth looking at she is."

Camille de Joyeuse turned for a moment to the reticent young prince who in his diffident way still lingered at her side.

Beyond, at the farther end of the room, notes rippled. Standing near a grand piano, the Roumanian with the flowing hair was preluding a fantasy of his own.

In the hush that succeeded, Verplank moved to where Violet sat.

Smilingly, without speaking, she gave him her hand and indicated a seat beside her. Then, raising a fan, she whispered:

"Demon! What have you done? Where do you spring from? How long have you been in Paris?"

Verplank, seating himself, answered:

"I got here this morning. Why am I a demon?"

From behind the fan, Violet asked:

"What did you do to Leilah? Why did she leave you?"

Verplank folded his gloved hands. "That is what I am here to find out."

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know!"

"I have not an idea—unless it was because of this Count Thingumagig."

Violet Silverstairs furled her fan, looked at him, looked away, looked about the room. At one end her husband, accompanied by de Joyeuse, Tempest, de Fresnoy, and the others, had entered. At the further end the Roumanian dominated. Supported en sourdine by an accompanist, he massed sounds and dispersed them, concentrating fulgurations of notes from which echoing showers fell. Presently, resuming an abandoned measure, he caressed a largo, infinitely sweet, that swooned in the languors of the finale. At once to a murmur of bravos, the applause of gloved hands and a cry of "Bis!" raising violin and bow above his head, he bent double to the duchess, his flowing hair falling like a veil before him.

"He may play again," said Violet. "I want to talk to you. Let us go into the next room."

As Verplank rose at her bidding, others who had been seated, rose also. Interrupted conversations were more animatedly resumed. A servant announced additional names. The first salon now was thronged. The second was filled. Verplank and Violet passed on.

Beyond was a gallery. At the entrance

stood a woman, her face averted, talking to a man. As the others approached, she turned.

At sight of her and of the man, Violet would have turned also. It was too late.

"Leilah!" Verplank exclaimed.

For a second, in tragic silence, two beings whom love had joined and fate had separated, stood, staring into each other's eyes.

For a second only. At once the man interposed himself between them.

"Monsieur!" he insolently threw out. "My name is Barouffski."

With superior tact Lady Silverstairs intervened. "Good evening, Count. It never occurred to us that we were interrupting a tête-à-tête."

She paused. Hostilely the two men were measuring each other. In Verplank's face there was a threat, in Barouffski's there was a jeer, in Leilah's there was an expression of absolute terror. Of the little group Violet alone appeared at ease.

"Leilah," she added, "don't forget that you are to have luncheon with me tomorrow. Good night, my dear. Silverstairs and I will be going soon. Good night, Barouffski."

She smiled, nodded, took Verplank's arm, took him away. But the arm beneath her hand

was shaking and she realised that it shook with rage.

Sympathetically she looked up at him. "I thought they were in the other room and it was just to avoid a thing of this sort that I got you out of it. You won't do anything, will you?"

Verplank now had got control of himself, his arm no longer shook, and it was the smile of a man of the world, the smile of one to whom nothing is important and much absurd, that he answered:

"Why, yes; it was very civil of this chap to introduce himself. I shall leave a card on him. Hello! Here's Silverstairs! I wonder if he will introduce himself, too."

The young earl was advancing, his hand outstretched. "I say! I saw a man marching off with the missis, but I had no idea it was you. Where are you stopping? Will you dine with us Tuesday?"

"Yes, do." Violet threw in. "Rue François Premier at eight."

"I shall be very glad to," Verplank answered. He turned to Silverstairs. "I am at the Ritz. Stop by there to-morrow noon, won't you, and let me take you somewhere for luncheon?"

Lady Silverstairs laughed and employing a

darkyism, said: "You don't say turkey to me. There!" she exclaimed as Verplank was about to protest. "I could not anyway."

From the salon beyond came a woman's voice, clear and rich, rendering, in a lascive contralto, a song of love and passion.

The Silverstairs and Verplank approached. Meanwhile, from the diva's mouth, notes darted like serpents on fire. In mounting fervour the aria developed, trailing, as it climbed, words such as *amore, speranza, morir.* A breath of brutality passed. The atmosphere became charged with emanations in which the perfume of women mingled with the desires of men. Still the aria mounted, it coloured the air, projecting, like a magic lantern, visions of delight, imperial and archaic, that ascended in glittering scales.

Verplank, detaching himself from the Silverstairs, felt his dumb rage renewed. At the moment he conceived an insane idea of going below, waiting without until Barouffski and Leilah appeared and he saw himself, confronting the man, tearing the woman from him, carrying her off and making her his own.

The impulse fell from him. The rage that he felt at the man deflected into rage at this woman who had made his life a vacant house and for what, good God! And why?

In a cascade of flowers and flames the song was ending. There was new applause, the discreet approbation of worldly people, easily pleased, as easily bored and with but one sure creed: Not too much of anything.

Verplank must also have had enough. When presently the Silverstairs looked about for him he had gone.

Already Violet had summarised the situation to her lord. Now, perplexed at Verplank's abrupt disappearance, she said:

"You don't suppose that anything will happen, do you?"

Silverstairs, bored by the entertainment, anxious only to get away where he could have a quiet drink, tugged at his moustache and with unconscious reminiscence answered:

"I don't know and I don't care. I don't care what happens as long as it doesn't happen to me."

V

"There are too many of us," Verplank, the day following, found himself saying to Silverstairs.

The two men were lunching at Voisin's.

The charming resort which, since the passing of Véry, of Véfour and the Maison Dorée, has become the ultimate refuge of the high gastronomic muse of Savarin and of Brisse was, on this forenoon, filled with its usual clientèle:—old men with pink cheeks, young women with ravishing hats, cosmopolitan sportsmen, ladies of both worlds, assortments of what Paris calls High Life and pronounces Hig Leaf.

Without, a fog draped the windows, blurred the movement of the street, transforming it into a cinematograph of misty silhouettes. But within, the brilliant damask, the glittering service, the studied excellence of everything, produced an atmosphere of wealth and ease.

Silverstairs, after swallowing a glass of Chablis, meditatively lit a cigar. But meditation was not his forte. The twentieth of his name, he was tall and robust. He had straw-

coloured hair, blue eyes, a skin of brick, and an appearance of simple placidity. At the moment he was mentally fondling certain reminiscences of the Isis and certain bouts with bargees there.

"You know," he said at last, "if I were you I would just march up to him and knock him down."

Verplank nodded. "I dare say. But not if he had taken your wife."

The suggestion, penetrating the earl's placidity, punctured it. He threw back his head. "By George! If he had, I'd kill him."

"There, you see!"

Silverstairs puffed at his cigar. His placidity now was reforming itself.

"Yes," he answered. "But then in taking yours, he did it after she was divorced. You can't have him out for that."

"All the same there are one too many of us."

Silverstairs filled his mouth with smoke. Longly, with an air of considering the situation he expelled it. Then he said:

"It is what I call damned awkward. But what the deuce can you do?"

"What can I do?" Verplank with an uplift of the chin repeated. "Why, if only for the manner in which he acted last night—"

"I know," Silverstairs interrupted. "The missis told me. He behaved like a fidgety Frenchman. I grant you that. But there were no words, nothing that you could put a finger on."

Through an adjacent door a man strolled in. He had his hat on and in one gloved hand he held a thin umbrella of which the handle was studded with gold nails. With the other hand he smoothed a black moustache. Through a monocle he was surveying the room. He looked careless and cynical.

Deferentially a maître d'hôtel addressed him. Ignoring the man he waved his umbrella at Silverstairs.

Silverstairs waved his hand. He turned to Verplank. "Here's de Fresnoy. He can put us straight. Let's ask him to join us."

Rising, he greeted the Parisian, invited him to the table, introduced Verplank, speaking as he did so in French, with an accent frankly barbarous which de Fresnoy seemed to enjoy.

The latter raised his hat to Verplank, confided it to the maître d'hôtel, gave him the umbrella also, while another waiter drew up for him a chair.

"Thanks," he said in an interval of these operations. "I see you have breakfasted. If you don't mind my eating while you smoke—"

Seating himself he turned to the waiter, a man short and stout, completely bald, with large dyed whiskers and an air of repressed satisfaction.

"Listen, Léopold, and note well what I say. To begin with do not attempt to tell me what you wish me to eat. You have heard? Good! Listen again. A dozen Ostendes, an omelette, a pear. Nothing else. Not a crumb. Yes, some Eau de Vals. Allez!"

Léopold bowed. "Perfectly, monsieur le baron. I shall have the honour of serving monsieur le baron with what he has been good enough to be willing to desire."

Again the waiter bowed. But behind the oleaginousness of his speech a severity had entered, one which intimated that in this preserve of gastronomics such an order was unworthy.

"These gentlemen?" he added, his eyes moving from Verplank to Silverstairs. "Some coffee? A liqueur?"

But now, in fluent French, Verplank was addressing de Fresnoy. "Silverstairs and I have been having an argument. In your quality of Parisian, will you tell us whether a man can have another out for looking impertinently at him?"

De Fresnoy adjusted his collar, patted his

neck-cloth. "But certainly, most assuredly. To look impertinently at a man constitutes an attack on his self esteem, which in itself is an integral part of his moral wealth. To omit to return a man's bow, to neglect to take his proffered hand, to regard him in an offensive manner, are one and all so many assaults on his dignity."

Verplank, pleased with this view of things, smiled. "Thanks. Mine has been assailed and I was in doubt how to rebuke the aggressor."

"It is simple as Good day. You have only to select two representatives and get them to put themselves in communication with him. If then he refuses to have friends of his meet yours, or if, afterward, he will neither apologise or fight, he is outlawed."

De Fresnoy, as he spoke, made a gesture, a wide movement of the arm which indicated, or was intended to indicate, the uttermost limits of the world.

"It is Barouffski," Silverstairs, with some idea that de Fresnoy might be aware of the anterior complication, threw out.

"Barouffski!" de Fresnoy repeated, his head held appreciatively a little to one side. "In a bout he is very clever. Barring d'Arcy, Helley-Quetgen"—and myself he was about to add, but throwing the veil he desisted—"I

don't know his equal. How he is on the field, personally I cannot say. But there, the absence of buttons, the absence of masks, the inevitable emotion, the sight of the other man, the consciousness of an injury to be maintained or avenged, the consciousness too of the definite character of any thrust you may give and particularly of any thrust you may receive, these things have such an effect that often the cleverest acts like a fool. On the boards, fencing is an exercise, it is an amusement. On the field, it is another man's blood—or yours. Though, after all, one is rarely killed except by one's seconds."

He turned to Verplank. "You fence? Or is it that you shoot?"

Verplank leaned back in his chair. "Oh, I suppose I can fire a gun."

Silverstairs laughed. "I say now! You are too modest by half." He looked at de Fresnoy. "Verplank is one of the crack shots of America."

De Fresnoy turned again to Verplank. "You should demand pistols then. Barouffski draws well, but at twenty paces he is less sure of himself. Have you selected your seconds?"

"I suppose I may count on Silverstairs for one——"

The young earl nodded. "That's of course,

and perhaps you, de Fresnoy, will act with me."

The Parisian smoothed his moustache. "I shall be much honoured. In that case, however, as necessary preliminary, I shall have to ask to be made acquainted with all the circumstances."

But now Léopold, bearing a dish on which were oysters green as stagnant scum, approached and with an air of infinite tenderness, much as though it were a baby, placed it before de Fresnoy.

Leisurely he began to eat.

Verplank, who had been looking out of the window, leaned forward. "The circumstances are evangelical in their simplicity. Last evening I was about to speak to Madame Barouffska when he put himself between us and eyed me in the manner which I have described."

De Fresnoy, considering him over an oyster, said:

"You were at the Joyeuses then?"

Verplank nodded.

"And there Barouffski objected to your speaking to his wife?"

"Yes."

De Fresnoy swallowed the oyster. "In that case he was guilty not only of a grave offense

to you, but to Madame de Joyeuse as well. The duke would be the first to resent it."

With an idea of making it all very clear, Silverstairs put an oar in: "Madame Barouffska, you know, was formerly Madame Verplank."

De Fresnoy bent a little. It may be that because of Silverstairs' ultra English accent he had not understood. "Pardon?"

But here Verplank intervened. "This lady had been divorced from me before she married Barouffski."

De Fresnoy, over another oyster, turned to him again. Yet any surprise he may have experienced he was too civil to display.

"Ah, indeed!" he replied. He looked as though he were about to add something, but refraining, he paused.

Verplank helped him out. "You are thinking perhaps that there may have been circumstances that rendered further acquaintance between us inadmissible. I may assure you that there are none and, without wishing to intrude my private affairs, I may assure you also that to this hour I am unaware why the divorce was obtained. This lady had no grievance of any kind against me and I had none whatever against her."

Pontifically, in his deepest note, Silverstairs

threw out: "In the States they give you a divorce for a Yes or a No."

"For married people," de Fresnoy remarked, yet so pleasantly that the sarcasm was lost, "America is the coming country."

As he spoke, the fat waiter, after supervising the removal of the first dish, produced, with the air of a conjurer, another. It was an omelette, golden without, frothy within.

De Fresnoy glanced up. "Countermand the pear. Instead, bring me paper and ink."

"Perfectly, monsieur le baron."

Slowly de Fresnoy attacked the food. After a mouthful he said to Silverstairs:

"When the writing materials come we can get off a note to Barouffski. If he has any explanation he can advance it. Otherwise—on guard!"

After another mouthful he said to Verplank:

"You have fought before?"

"I have not had the occasion."

"Nor I," interjected Silverstairs. "It is against the law in England."

Gravely, as though he were receiving valuable information de Fresnoy bowed. "So it is here. But with us it is custom that rules, not law. No jury would convict an honourable man for fighting a fair fight. Besides,

dueling is in our blood. It will not disappear as chivalry has. It will last as long as there are French men—and French women. And yet, in saying that chivalry has disappeared, I am in error. Not later than the week before last a cousin of mine, a young man truly charming, married a monster."

He pushed aside his plate. "Well, then, Léopold, am I to sit here the entire day?"

Serviceably, a buvard in his hand, the waiter approached. "I have subventioned a new pen for the use of monsieur le baron."

"There, Léopold, your sins are remitted. See at once if the chasseur is free."

De Fresnoy looked at Silverstairs. "With your permission, in our joint names, I write."

He looked at Verplank. "Will you pardon me if I ask how your name is spelled?"

Verplank, getting at his case, extracted a card.

De Fresnoy glanced at it. Then, taking that new pen, he read, as he wrote, aloud.

M. le Comte Barouffski.

Monsieur: M. Verplank has requested the Earl of Silverstairs and myself to arrive at an understanding with two of your friends concerning an incident which occurred last evening in the Avenue Cours la Reine.

Lord Silverstairs and I will be obliged if, as soon as

possible, you will ask one of your friends to appoint a meeting at which we may deliberate.

Receive, Monsieur, the expression of my distinguished sentiments.

Baron de Fresnoy

He looked over at Silverstairs. "Is that to your liking? Good! We will send it to the Little Club where the answer is to be left and we will have a reply today. En attendant, there are matters that claim me."

With a movement of the chin he summoned the waiter.

A little byplay followed; the presentation of the bill, the click of gold on porcelain, the carelessly gathered change, the meagre tip, the reappearance of the hat, the bowing waiters, the craning necks, and the departure of de Fresnoy, an umbrella under his arm, a cigar between his teeth.

Verplank, emptying a glass of Chablis, looked out of the window. A panorama was forming. He saw the room at Coronado, Leilah as she told him of her love, his brief absence, his harrowing return, the hunt for her that had extended over half the globe, a hunt that divorce had not terminated, which her re-marriage had not stopped and which, had he not at last discovered her, nothing could have stayed save his death or hers or the

reason of the implacable Why. An obstacle to the Why or, it might be, the incarnation of it, was Barouffski, and Verplank saw himself standing somewhere with Barouffski before him. There was a command, the call of numbers, a detonation and the sight of Barouffski turning, swaying, falling down.

The panorama faded. A picture had appeared. Before the window, arrested by a congestion of traffic, a motor was stopping. In it and the mist was Leilah.

Verplank sprang to his feet. With the idea of going out to her there and forcing an explanation, he looked about for his hat.

Silverstairs also got up. He had not seen. He too was looking for his hat. Placidly he remarked:

"I have an appointment with a chap named Tempest. Will you come with me?"

But now, the congestion relieved, the motor shot on. Verplank had the spectacle of a face fading instantly in the fog and the future.

"Will you?" Silverstairs repeated.

"Will I what?"

"I have to see a man about a horse. He lives just off the Bois de Boulogne, in the rue de la Pompe. Will you come up there with me?"

"Yes, if you will go on foot. In that case

I'll leave you there and walk back. I need the exercise. I feel like what you described as a fidgety Frenchman."

Silverstairs pulled at his moustache. "It's no end of a walk. But no matter, I'll go you."

VI

That morning Leilah had two appointments, one with a modiste, the other with Violet Silverstairs. She did not feel equal to either. The episode of the previous evening had been to her like the supreme torture which medieval legislation devised. It was all she could bear —and more!

When, abruptly, she found herself face to face with Verplank, it was as though she were confronted by the dead. The sense of it numbed her, and the numbness was heightened by a horror that has no name. Into the seats of thought there entered the realisation that, in spite of all, she still loved him, that in spite of all he still loved her. In the core of these convictions fear entered, fear of him, fear of herself, a sensation of common peril and mutual perdition so blinding that Barouffski's rudeness she barely noticed, and it was with a look the damned may have that she saw Verplank turn with Violet Silverstairs, and go.

As they passed, Barouffski, with the air of one commenting on a triviality, remarked:

"How odd it is that the Joyeuses should care to hobnob with demi-castors. Shall we go?"

That demi-castors meant bounders generally, and, in this instance, specifically, she would, ordinarily, have been insufficiently familiar with the slang of the boulevards to know. But she did not hear. Moreover, the remark required no reply. Even otherwise she was unable to speak, and it was not until Barouffski reiterated his suggestion that mechanically she acceded to it with a movement of the head.

Her demeanor then in traversing the salons, her leave-taking of the duchess, her bearing in descending the stairs, were as mechanical as her reply to Barouffski, and it was not until after the motor had dropped him, as he had asked that it should, at the door of the Little Club, that, at last alone, the mental anchylosis fell by.

At once in a sort of retrograde vision, she relived the past. There had been the flight from Coronado, the halt at Salt Lake, the descent into Nevada, the divorce, the journey abroad, the platonic marriage to Barouffski. These—the succeeding episodes in the drama of her life—were so many hostages to joy, barricades thrown one after another between Verplank and herself, and unavailingly thrown, since, with but a look, they were almost destroyed.

They had seemed wholly impregnable, but she knew then that unless reinforced by surer bars, they would one and all collapse. At the foreknowledge of that she appreciated what the heroines in the old tragedies endured, when circled by the seven-times-twisted coil of fate. Yet, though they had yielded, she would not yield, and it was with this determination that she alighted in the rue de la Pompe.

The house there had a church for neighbour, and stood between a court and a garden. Before the court was a high, white wall. The garden extended back to the parallel street, where, also, was a wall. The entrance to the court was a double doorway, the entrance to the garden was an iron gate. Between the gate and the house were large urns, a marble bench, a marble chair, most noticeably the kennels of two mastiffs, pets of Barouffski who, at whatever hour he returned at night, had them loosed. They were, he declared, a great protection, as indeed they were—for him. Apart from the occasional barking of these dogs, barring also occasional music from the church, usually the garden was quiet. But that was in the order of things. It lacked both stable and garage. These had been secured elsewhere.

Except for that detail, the arrangements gen-

erally were satisfactory. The house was commodious, agreeably furnished. On the ground floor were the usual offices, beneath which the servants slept. On the floor above were the salons and dining hall. Above these were the bedrooms. On this upper floor the apartment which Barouffski occupied gave on the street, while Leilah's overlooked the garden.

Adjacent to her suite was a stairway designed for servants, but which, because of its convenience, she occasionally used. It led directly to the dining hall, and from there she could descend into the garden.

It had a superior advantage. It enabled her to avoid the hazards of the main stairway, which was used by Barouffski, whom nearer acquaintance had discovered to her without the mask—without one mask, that is—for histrion that he was, he had many, but the best, the feigned nobility of noble pride, the assumed parage, had gone.

In its place was a smile, constant, equivocal, ambiguous, a smile such as the consciously damned may display. It gave Leilah little creeps. She dreaded it, dreaded him, dreaded both, what is worse she dreaded instinctively, without knowing why. The man was amiable, serviceable, gallant. He wore his

domino not faultlessly perhaps but with the fine air of a bravo who, when the time comes, will knife you, yes, but who in so doing will rather require that you admire the chasing on the handle of the blade. As yet the knife was concealed. But Leilah felt that it was there. He knew it was. Occasionally he fingered the point.

Hitherto he had lived by expedients. A golden six had been tossed him. He had pocketed it. For him the economic problem of life was solved. He asked little else, merely that the solution should endure and that his dignity, of which he had a humorous conception, be outwardly preserved. In addition to his dignity, or to his idea of it, he had another attribute. He was not exacting. It is a great charm in any one. But with him it did not extend to money. Freely he demanded it, freely she gave and it was precisely when he demanded it that she felt, and he felt, too, the point of the knife.

On this evening when, after the usual din at the doors, the motor entered the court and she alighted at the perron, two footmen busied themselves in aiding her.

Leilah passed through the dining room to the garden where for a while she walked along the path that led from the house to the gate.

The garden was cloistered, the night serene. The influences of both affected her. The darkness put her thoughts into relief, the solitude relaxed the tension of her nerves.

Another thing was helpful, the determination which she had reached, though for that determination to be maintained there must, she saw, be further hostages, new barricades. But what further hostages could she give she wondered, what firmer barricades was it possible to erect? Barring flight or an appeal to Verplank, some message begging him to leave Paris, she could not imagine any. Flight she had already tried, but not flight to some one of the world's far away places where any one may be lost forever. It was a miserably dismal thing to do, she reflected, a thing so dismal and so miserable that she doubted her ability to do it.

As she thought it over she wondered if in some former existence she could have injured Verplank and whether it were by way of retribution that he had the power to tempt and torture her now. Tenets of this character the *Vidyâ* advanced and as she had told Tempest, she had come to believe in that Scripture as many do in the Bible, though as many also do without being able to accept it entirely, without being able to accept for instance stories

such as that of Jonah and the whale which none the less all would accept were it known how profound is the symbolism behind them. With like reservations, Leilah accepted the *Vidyâ*. She was very ignorant as women in her station generally are and the reservations were due to that ignorance and also to the demand which the doctrine made on her imagination. But though she was ignorant she was conscious of it and consciousness of ignorance is usually the condition precedent to enlightenment.

Now, in considering the episode of the evening, she asked herself whether she was warranted in accepting this creed of past lives. At the Joyeuses, during the announcements of resonant names, Tempest had said that unless we swallow the ridiculous dogma of a soul specially created at every birth and unless too we are indecent enough to fancy the Deity waiting for that purpose on the passions and caprices of man, we have to accept it, have to accept with it the corollary of past actions and their consequences, have to accept, too, the deduction that, in accordance with our past actions, it is we who reward or punish ourselves, we who become avenging furies or angels of light.

Leilah wished that she could have discussed the matter more fully with Tempest yet she felt

that what he had said was logical, but if it were true, then the parallel doctrine that all misdeeds and with them all misfortunes spring from desire must be true also, in which case, before their consequences can be effaced, all misdeeds must be atoned. But how can they be atoned? she asked herself. Presently she remembered. According to the *Vidyâ,* any desire no matter what, desire for pleasure, for gain, for attainments, for honours, even the desire for spiritual perfection, even the desire for the lack of desire, must be extinguished before old scores are paid. That was the way she saw, the only way. The debtor must sacrifice himself to himself.

But, uncertain still, she went over the matter again, putting to it little tests, passably naïf yet serviceable to her. She had ardently desired to marry Verplank, then, desiring as ardently a barricade against him, she had married Barouffski. In the one case the result had been catastrophic; in the other, calamitous. Doubtless she had sinned in the past and these disasters, brought about by her own desires, were her punishment. There were other things that she had desired. She had wanted to be loved, she had wanted to be thought a beauty, and not only her love had shamed her but soon she might be ashamed to show her

face. At the thought of these things she realised anew and more profoundly than ever that selfish desire is the root of evil and that only in its extirpation may peace be had. But coincidently she realised also that any such extirpation was beyond her. Heredity, environment, the circumstances of her life, had given an impetus to desire which she could not arrest. She liked wealth, ease, pretty clothes, becoming hats, the society of agreeable people. She liked the world and in liking it she feared that she liked also the flesh, it might be even that she liked, too, the devil. Yet, she must not, she knew.

In telling herself that, she thought of the Church. The Church was so much more comfortable. There you were not asked impossibilities, the one requirement was to throw yourself in her arms and repent. As the facile process occurred to her she recalled George Moore's story of *Evelyn Innes*. That masterwork seemed to tell her to do as the heroine had done and go in a convent.

Perhaps she might, she thought. Perhaps she must.

Several times already she had crossed and recrossed the garden. Now she found herself at the farther end facing the iron gate.

Leilah opened it, walked to the corner and returned.

The little tentative evasion had been successful. At any time, unseen even by a servant, she could leave the house, disappear utterly, be forever ingulfed. But the knowledge that she could escape into darkness and be lost there, offered little more than a choice between tears. It presented a form of suicide which was superior only to actual death. She hoped she might be spared it. She hoped an appeal to Verplank would suffice, though in what manner it could best reach him, or, for that matter, reach him at all, she found it difficult to decide. To make it personally was impossible. To attempt it through Violet Silverstairs would involve an explanation and that was impossible also. The idea of employing one of her women occurred to her. There were manifest objections to such a course, though the particular woman whom she had in view she trusted entirely.

Slowly she returned to the house and went to her room. There, when at last the servants had gone and she was alone, she knelt on a priedieu and, to the Watchers of the Seven Spheres, prayed for the earthly peace of her soul and of his. She knew that no prayer could affect them, she knew that they are not to be

propitiated or coerced, but it soothed her as prayer, in raising the vibrations, does soothe the distressed. The prayer concluded she began another. She prayed that sometime she might be somewhere, on some plane, where all things broken are made complete and found again things vanished.

Then, the solace of it still upon her, suddenly she saw by what the prayer had been induced. The consciousness confused and presently, in the melancholy sotto-voce of thought, she told herself that to extinguish that desire, she would have to be in Dharmakaya—the mystic state where there is oblivion of all things here.

"Here!" she caught herself repeating. For, at once, a passage from the *Upanishads* prompting, she remembered that here means Myalba, which is hell, the greatest of all hells and, for those of this evolution, the only hell there is.

VII

It was on the morning succeeding these incidents that Leilah felt unequal for the appointments she had made. But however she felt, she always did what she had planned. In this instance nature punished her. On the way to the first appointment, a malaise overtook her, enveloped her, beat at her and although, gradually, it fell by, she was still conscious of it when, in the rue Cambon, the motor stopped at the modiste's door.

"The fitting of madame la comtesse Barouffska!" a fair young girl in black immediately and authoritatively announced.

Before landscapes of silk, in the delight of new modes, customers were sunning themselves At the announcement they turned, while Leilah, conducted by another girl who had advanced to meet her, crossed the laboratory of enchantments and entered an adjoining room.

But, for the moment, the fitting was delayed. The première was elsewhere occupied. When presently she appeared she excitedly exclaimed:

"I hope I have not detained madame. I am desolated if I have. But! But! If madame knew! One is literally torn to pieces! All day long it is nothing but Ernestine that dress! Ernestine, that robe! Ernestine, that costume! Ernestine this! Ernestine that! Truly madame, there are moments when I say I die! I go crazy!"

Abruptly dropping her voice, she added: "But pardon, I monologue."

At once, indicating a gown which an assistant had brought, she exclaimed again:

"It will ravishingly become madame."

The gown, a work of the best Parisian art, suggested something of the immateriality of a moonbeam, and as the assistant, a girl with a tired face and circled eyes, held it for inspection, it gleamed.

Leilah looked at it, wondering the while where she would wear it, whether indeed she would wear it at all. Then, before a sheet that had been placed on the floor and on which the assistant arranged the gown in a circle she proceeded to undress.

To the amateur in feminine beauty, there are few spectacles more attractive than that of an attractive woman clothed in lingerie and a hat. This spectacle Leilah presented.

The première exclaimed at it. "Madame la

comtesse has a figure truly divine. But! But! Who could have laced her?"

"I was not very well this morning," Leilah replied. "I told my women not to make me too tight. But you can take me in I think about an inch."

"Marguerite," said the première, "draw the stays a little closer."

The girl with the tired face undid the corset and pulled at the strings. But she pulled awkwardly, perhaps too suddenly.

Leilah gasped, turned, sat down and fell forward. The première hurried to her. She had fainted.

"The smelling salts!" the première cried. "The smelling salts! Cognac! Get some cognac!"

With one hand she was supporting Leilah, with the other she gesticulated at Marguerite who, hurriedly from the mantel, fetched a vinaigrette which Ernestine then took and sniffed at.

"She's coming to," said the assistant.

Ernestine waved the vinaigrette. "The gods be praised!"

For Leilah now had opened her eyes. Wearily she looked about, straightened herself and sighed.

"I must have fainted."

"It is nothing madame," Ernestine anxiously protested. "Truly nothing and yet so modish. Yesterday the Princesse de Solférino fainted. The day before it was the turn of the young Duchesse de Malakoff. Such a good augury for these ladies! Like them madame is perhaps——"

But Leilah now was making an effort to rise.

Abandoning the vinaigrette Ernestine aided her.

"Madame will perhaps wish the fitting postponed. Yes, is it not? It might further fatigue madame. To-morrow—no, to-morrow I regret but in the afternoon I have three appointments and in the morning there is the trousseau of Miss Smith of New York who is to marry an English lord. Marguerite!" she interrupted herself to exclaim. "The costume of madame!"

Then, as the assistant also assisted Leilah, reflectively the première resumed:

"I hear that every New York young lady loves a lord. But——"

She hesitated. Visibly the vision evoked, confused. Yet, after a second's pause, rallying, she continued.

"Perhaps it is not every New York young lady who has a lord to love. Perhaps many of them love the same lord."

Discreetly she smiled. "And that must be so nice for him!"

Considering Leilah, she concluded:

"But another day——"

Of it all, Leilah heard but that. "Yes," she answered, "another day."

Then, presently, after more attentions, the première accompanied her to the door.

"Rue François Premier," Leilah told the groom.

The machine shot ahead. Arrested shortly by a congestion of traffic, it halted before a window behind which Verplank and Silverstairs sat.

Leilah, unconscious of their presence, gazed at the murky cinematograph of the street, filled at this hour with faces sordid, petulant, indifferent, or frankly gay; with the passing forms of workmen, idlers, shopgirls, vagabonds; the swarming Parisian crowd which did not, she believed, contain one soul as miserable as her own.

The congestion relieved, the motor shot on. Leilah leaned back. It was not so long ago that she was on her way from New York to Coronado. She was happy then, happy with a happiness so perfect that it lifted her into the ultimate ecstasies which love and life comport. It was not so long ago, only six short months,

only that brief eternity of sorrow which, unended yet, had been the damning penalty of that joy.

"In this life ye shall have tribulation," the Christ had said, and truly said, and as she rememorated the significant menace, she wondered whether for such as she, tribulation ended here. But her creed assured her. From the *Vidyâ* she had acquired faith in fate, the belief rather that we make our own destiny, that it is by our own hands that our lives are cast in places pleasant or the reverse, that our conduct in one life creates the conditions of our existence in another, that anything experienced now is the effect of a cause set going in the past, that happiness is the recompense of beneficence, deformity the result of cruelty, melancholy the penalty of evil thoughts. But whether retribution pursued its victim into future planes or abandoned them when they died, depended, she also believed, on how they faced it here, and it was in this idea that, during the unended sorrow, she had found the strength to bear its coils.

The motor stopped. She told the groom to wait. Presently she was among the subdued tints and harmonised furnishings of the drawing room of her friend.

At once, clearly in her limpid voice, con-

sidering her with brilliant eyes, Violet Silverstairs aimed and fired.

"You're a liar!"

At the shot Leilah attempted to smile, and though she failed, it was not because she fancied there could be any reproach in the term, but because latterly she had been unable to smile at all.

"You're a liar," Violet repeated. "Also, you are late."

"I know I am late and I am sorry," Leilah withdrawing her gloves, replied. "But how am I a liar?"

"Come to luncheon and you will precious soon find out. I had some eggs for you, eggs à l'Aurore Boréale. I had a sweetbread. I had—I have forgotten what else. Now I have nothing. Everything is spoiled."

Violet Silverstairs was perhaps imaginative. There were eggs, very good eggs too, though whether prepared in the Aurora Borealis fashion is perhaps beside the issue. Moreover there was a sweetbread, one that had been germinated on salt meadows and which was not spoiled in the least. In addition there were the other things which she had forgotten and all of them appetising in the extreme. It was an excellent luncheon, perfectly served in a beautiful room. But it was a luncheon for

Sybarites, not for the suffering. After the first morsel Leilah was unable to eat.

"Where is Silverstairs?" she asked when that morsel had been consumed.

"With your ex."

Leilah put down her fork. "With Gulian?"

Violet laughed. "Have you more than one? But it was just through him that your lie cropped out. Last night he swore by bell, book and candle that you had never told him why you cut and ran."

It was at this juncture that Leilah found herself unable to eat. Instantly her mind shot back. She was at Coronado again, in the sunshine and frippery of her sitting room. She could see Verplank as he left it, see the letters that had been brought, see herself as she opened one of them, that one which with its enclosures she had redirected and left for him. The possibility never before conjectured, that he had not received it girdled her with a zone of ice. For a moment she looked fixedly at one of the windows through which the pale daylight fell. In the beautiful room, companioned by her nearest friend, she felt that sense of utter loneliness which in the great crises of life is experienced by all. Yet was it true?

"Violet!" she cried. "You are jesting."

But the lady, determined then or never to learn the truth, cocked an eye at her. "I am not, nor was he."

At that, Leilah felt the girdle of ice sending its shivers through her. The plan she had made must, she saw, be foregone. If Verplank did not know why she had separated from him, never would he leave Paris until he did. But what must he have thought, she agonisedly reflected, and what must he think!

Violet, who had been watching her, said: "Why don't you tell me?"

Leilah taking up her fork again, tried for countenance sake, to affect to eat. The effort was beyond her. She put it down.

"I can't," she at last replied.

Violet, her brilliant eye still cocked, almost winked.

"Yes, you said that before. But you see, don't you know, that whether you can or cannot tell me, you will have to tell him and, in the circumstances, would it not be best to have me do it for you? To be sure, if you had taken my advice and omitted to marry Barouffski, I would say, have it out with him yourself. But your marriage does not seem to have simplified matters, which, so far as I can make out, are now pretty thoroughly mixed."

The lady spoke better than she knew. Mat-

ters were complicated though how profoundly she had no idea, nor was Leilah aware that the situation, already tortuous, was to become even more intricately labyrinthine.

"Of course," Violet, in her bell-like voice, threw out, "after running away, getting a divorce and marrying another man, I can fancy that you don't much want to see him. But, really, you owe it to yourself to give the reason, particularly as it is he who is to blame."

At this, Leilah, who had been looking down into her prison, looked up. "I never said so."

"No, but was it necessary? Even nowadays, even in the States, a woman does not cut and run because butter won't melt in her husband's mouth. She does so because she has, or thinks she has, a grievance and the man, if he is a man, ought to be given an opportunity to apologise, however imaginary the grievance may be."

Leilah shook her head. "There can be no apology here."

Violet laughed. "That is just what I would say if I had gone and done it. Then it would be for Silverstairs to try on his knees to get me to listen to one—provided, of course, that in the interim I had not taken over another man, for in that case I verily believe he would wring my neck. But you need fear nothing of

the sort from Verplank. He seemed anxious only to wring Barouffski's."

Leilah made another futile effort with her fork. Absently she answered:

"I don't believe he knew who he was."

"You don't! After his telling him! But, apropos, what became of d'Arcy? I thought you and he were safely tucked away in a corner, otherwise never in the world would I have marched your Number One up to your Number Two."

"D'Arcy!" Leilah repeated. She had barely heard. She scarcely knew what she was saying, still less what was being said.

"Yes, le beau d'Arcy. Marie de Fresnoy told me that the other day at the races he was about to pay a ragamuffin of a girl for a flower, when she said: "I'd rather you kissed me." Fancy that! She told me too that a man who had a husband's reasons for wanting to kill him, was afraid to say a word. It appears he is a dead shot. But it appears also that your lovely Barouffski is one of the best swordsmen here. Verplank had better look out. To return though to our Chablis Moutonne. What will you do?"

Leilah, her thoughts afar, made no reply.

"What will you do?" Violet repeated.

From afar the question floated, descended,

trod among the tender places of Leilah's soul. At the pain of it she winced. "God help me, I do not know."

Violet, cocking an eye again, insinuated: "Let me take a hand." She paused, then, for clincher, threw out: "He dines here to-morrow."

"Here!" Leilah exclaimed, half rising, fearful now that at any moment he might appear. "Here! With you?"

Violet nodded. "Why yes. Why not? If I can't confess you, perhaps I can him. At any rate I can try. You can't blame me for wanting to, either. You abandoned him on your honeymoon. You won't tell me why and he says he don't know. But he must suspect. He must have concluded that you left him for this, that or the other. I want to find out what his this, that and the other are and then make my own selection. It is true he did say that it was because of Barouffski. But that's all gammon. You never saw Barouffski until you got here. There is something else and what that is I want to find out. No, you can't blame me. It is the instinct of self-preservation. If I don't get at the bottom of it soon, I shall simply go mad."

A laugh, clear and musical, wound up the lady's chatter. She had no more idea of

going mad than she had of jumping out of the window. But she wanted to know and that was only human.

But now, Leilah, who a moment before had half risen, stood up. "Violet, I am not well, you must let me go. Yes," she added as the lady remarked that on the morrow she might appear in the rue de la Pompe. "Yes, yes."

She would have said yes to anything. Hurriedly she got away.

Without the motor waited.

"Home," she told the groom.

A little before she had thought herself the most miserable of beings. But however deep the hell, there is always a deeper one. Add uncertainty to distress and the sum of it is sorrow multiplied by the infinite. That hell, that sorrow was or seemed to be, hers. She did not know where to go, what to do, to whom to turn.

The pitiable plan of flight returned to her. Again she put it aside. She could not adopt it now. Besides, though she owed a duty to herself, she owed another to Verplank. In what manner he had failed to receive the letter, it was impossible for her to imagine, but the fact that he had not received it, hurt her doubly, hurt her for herself, hurt her for him. Had it reached him, both would have been

spared this pass. But it had not reached him and since then what must he have thought of her? What!

The query, which kept repeating itself, tortured her and on that torture was superposed the precarious problem of his enlightenment. See him she could not. To write was beyond her ability. For there are things no pen should write as there are others no tongue should tell. None the less the truth she knew must reach him and would do so best, she thought, through some channel similar to that from which the letter had proceeded, from a source either indifferent or inimical to them both.

At the auto-suggestion, her thoughts fluttered, scattered, grouped, then suddenly regrouping, produced a name. Beneath her breath she uttered it.

"Barouffski!"

It was not in provision of this that she had married him. At the time no such possibility had even impossibly loomed. But she had married him precisely as she had obtained a divorce, in order to barricade the future from the past; in order also for the fleshpots which she craved—peace and security. She had not had much of either. None the less, the primary object which she had sought had, in its

accomplishment, persisted. He was a barricade. He was her official and paid protector.

For the task therefore which she could not perform, he seemed naturally indicated. What alone gave her pause was the certainty that he would enjoy it. She could see him, see his ambiguous smile, see his green eyes aglow, his cruel and sensual mouth distended.

From the picture she turned. Beyond was a church, the frontal draped with black. The motor had stopped. It had reached the house in the rue de la Pompe and pending the opening of the doors, whirred as it blocked the sidewalk.

It was then that she turned. Beside her, arrested by the car, stood Verplank.

After walking up from Voisin's with Silverstairs he had left him a moment earlier at Tempest's.

But the great doors had opened. Before Verplank could speak, the machine slid in. As it entered the court, the doors closed noisily.

VIII

On alighting at the perron, Leilah had as always to endure the ceremonial of two footmen assiduously assisting her.

"Emmanuel," she said to one of them. "Is Monsieur Barouffski at home?"

"No, madame la comtesse."

Leilah passed on and up. For a moment, in the hall above, she hesitated. Then, pushing a portière aside, she entered a salon, went to the window, and looked out. Crossing the court was Verplank.

Fear and the fear of it, the throttling sensation which children know when pursued, enveloped her. With an idea of telling the servants that she was out, that she was ill, that she could see no one, she turned. On a table near the entrance was a service of Sevrès. Its tender hues were repeated on the ceiling. Beneath was the mirror of a waxed and polished floor. On the glistening wood work her foot slipped. She staggered, recovered herself, got to the door.

Already Verplank had entered. She could

hear him. He was not asking, he was demanding to see her. The form of the order mounted violently.

"Tell your mistress that I am here."

Even then, with the idea that she might still deny herself, Leilah drew back into the room. Mentally she was framing a phrase when Emmanuel entered.

With that air domestics have when tidying something objectionable, the footman reconstructed Verplank's command:

"There is a monsieur who inquires whether madame la comtesse receives?"

"Tell him——"

But the injunction, as yet not wholly formed, was never completed. Verplank, brushing the man aside, strode in.

Leilah, retreating before him, motioned at Emmanuel, and the servant, with an affronted air of personal grievance, vacated this room that was charged now with the vibrations of hostilities begun.

Retreating yet farther, her eyes on the foe, Leilah stared at him, and, as she retreated, Verplank, staring, too, advanced. In his stare were threats so voluble that she thought: "He will kill me." At the thought, there appeared before her Death's liberating face, the mysteriously consoling visage which

it reveals to those alone who have reached the depth of human woe.

Beyond, from the church, came the music of an organ. A requiem was being held. Leilah felt as though it were her own.

Verplank, his hands clenched, the look of an executioner about him, threw at her:

"For six months I have been looking for you. I am come to have you tell me why I have had to look at all."

"*Dies irae, dies illa,*" admirably, in a clear contralto, a woman's voice rang out.

Neither heard it. At the menace of the man, Leilah shrank, and in an effort at defense cried pitiably:

"Gulian! I left a letter for you."

Angrily he tossed his head.

"I received none, nor did I need any to tell me that there are women on the street, others in jail, that are less vile than you."

"*Teste David cum Sibylla,*" clearly and beautifully the voice resumed.

"Gulian!" Leilah cried again.

With whips in his words, he added:

"No harlot could have acted more infamously than you."

At the lash of the outrage, Leilah, joining her hands, held them to him. "Gulian! You are killing me!"

"It is what you deserve. There are no penalties now for such turpitudes as yours. But, when there were, women like you were beaten with rods, they were lapidated, stoned to death, and death was too good for them; they should have been made to go about, as they afterward were, as you should be, in a yellow wig, in a yellow gown, that even children might point and cry: 'Shame!'"

The words, which he tore from his mouth, he hurled at her. She cowered before them. On a chair near by she had put her bag. Her wrap had fallen from her. In the church now the hymn had ceased. The ringing of the Elevation was beginning.

"Gulian! As if shame had not cried at me! Gulian, I have been scourged, I have been stoned. If I live, it is to implore of you mercy."

Her hands, still joined, were still extended, and in her face was an expression of absolute despair. But this martyr attitude seemed to him the most abominable of hypocrisies, and it was with anger refreshed that he lashed her again.

"Mercy? Yes, you want mercy, you, who were merciless in your treachery to me. A sweep would have had more decency, a scullion more heart. I put in your hands my trust,

my love, my honour, and you who want mercy dragged them in dirt."

"Gulian!" Within her now was that invincible need of justice which impels the weakest to protest against the savagery of wrong. "Gulian! When you know!"

"I do know. I know you and your lies, and the infamy of them too well. At Coronado——"

"Gulian! You are not killing me merely, you torture my very soul."

He sneered.

"Do I? Do I, indeed! No, you compliment yourself. It is what I want to do, but you cheat me even there. No woman with a soul could have done this soulless thing."

The brutality of the arraignment shook her. She leaned against the chair for support. She felt hopeless, helpless, defenseless, and it was because the need for justice still impelled her, that she protested anew.

"Gulian, if only you knew! If only you had had that letter! Had it reached you, you would know that there was no deceit, that I left you for your sake as well as my own. Gulian, if I had not gone you would have seen and made me tell you, and then it may be you would have taken me and thrown me with you from the yacht."

There were tears in her words. With one hand she held to the chair, the other she raised to her head. It pained her. She felt bruised and looked it.

"Ecce panis Angelorum
Factus cibus viatorum——"

Beyond, sustained by the arpeggios of the organ, the voice of a singer mounted sheerly like a thread of gold. It lowered and heightened. Presently, on a note, as if abruptly snapped, it ceased. The organ continued. It renewed the canticle. It projected a scale that ascended slowly, as though upward and onward, over the limitless steps of eternity, it were lifting the soul of the dead.

Leilah wished it were her own. Sadly she added:

"God knows it would have been better. Anything would be better than that you should speak to me as you do."

There is an innocence that appeals, a sincerity that disarms, a candour that outfaces every proof, and Verplank, who had been bent on overwhelming this woman with a contempt which he felt wholly deserved, was impressed, in spite of himself, by the evident ingenuousness, by the evident wretchedness, too, of her words.

He moved back.

"You say I would have made you tell me?"

"Yes. Yes. You would have."

"But made you tell me what?"

Leilah, still holding one hand to her head, raised the other from the chair, and with it made a gesture slight, yet desolate.

"What was it?" he asked.

Before replying, she looked away.

"What I hid from you rather than repeat."

"But repeat what?"

Her face still turned from him, she answered:

"Something, my—something Mr. Ogston sent me."

"Mr. Ogston!" Verplank exclaimed. The formality of the statement astounded him. "Do you mean your father? What did he send you?"

But Leilah would not or could not speak. Her mouth contracted as though she were choking, and she put a hand to her throat.

"Tell me," he insisted.

She turned, and beseechingly she looked at him.

"Gulian, I cannot."

At that Verplank moved nearer, and so dominatingly that again she extended her hands.

"Gulian, I will get some one else to tell you. I had intended to. Believe me, it is better so."

"It concerns me?"

"Yes, you."

"And you?"

"Yes, both of us."

"Then you shall tell me, and tell me now. Do you hear?"

"Gulian!" she cried. She raised her clasped hands to him. "Gulian!"

But Verplank, his jaw ominously square, confronted her.

"I say you shall."

"Don't look at me then," she pleaded. "Bend your head, bend it lower. One second, then I will. One second—one. Ah, God! I cannot."

Verplank, who at her bidding had stooped, straightened himself, and caught at her.

"I say you shall."

"Gulian, a moment. Give me a moment. Now bend your head again. One moment, Gulian; your father, your father—— My mother loved him."

"Your mother loved my father!"

"Gulian, I am his daughter."

"You are what?"

"I am your sister."

As she whispered it, she covered her face. Verplank started, straightened again, raised his arm, and, with a gesture wide, elemental, absurd, and human, struck at the empty air.

Savagely he turned to her.

"And you believe this?"

Leilah, her head bowed, her face covered, shook with sobs.

"You believe it?" he repeated.

"There were letters," she stammered. "Three letters. No one could read them and not—and not——"

"And it was for this you left me?"

A fresh access seized her. He could not see her tears, he heard them.

"And it was for this you got a divorce?"

On the chair beside her was her bag. She felt in it, and got out a handkerchief.

"And it was for this you took that cad?"

Slowly, with infinite hesitations, the bit of cambric held to a face that was wet and white, she turned to him.

"I thought you would forget. I thought you would marry. I though you would be happy. I hoped so that you would. But my leaving you, the divorce, the marriage, these things were done with no idea of happiness. They were to serve as barriers between us."

Impotently he stamped a foot. He was fu-

rious still. But his anger had deflected. He was enraged less at her than at circumstances.

"Rubbish! That's what your barriers are."

Leilah, wiping her eyes, turned from him. The barriers, however fragile, were not rubbish to her.

Violently he continued:

"As for Barouffski——"

But Leilah, turning to him again, interrupted:

"Gulian, let me tell you. Last night I planned to have some one ask you, for my sake, to go away. Gulian, I thought you would, but I determined if you would not that I would go."

Verplank moved back.

"Go! Go where?"

"Ah! God knows! Anywhere. Wherever I could hide myself. Wherever I could hide my love for you."

Her eyes had been raised to his. At the confession they lowered of themselves. Then again she looked him in the face.

"Gulian, it is that which cried shame at me. It is that which scourged me with rods bitterer than those of which you spoke. You say the barriers are nothing. Gulian, you are wrong. To me they are eternal."

"Yes," he angrily retorted. "Yes, if your

story were true. But it isn't. It's arrant nonsense."

In miserable protest, she half raised a hand.

"Gulian, when I read those letters my youth died in me. Never since they reached me have I had the heart to smile. If you had seen them you would have felt the truth in every line."

"I would have felt nothing of the kind; the fact that you still care for me ought to show you that they are false."

"Gulian, I tried to think that, too; but even in trying I felt that I was pleading for myself."

"Then, for the love of God, stop pleading and act! Look at yourself, look at me! We could not be more unlike if we came from different planets."

She was making an effort to answer. He stopped her.

"Listen to this. If you can't act, I shall. My mother is in London. To-morrow she is to be here. Probably she can tell me the truth. If not, I will go to the States. There I will see your father. When I return it will be with proofs. I will bring them if I have to drag that old scoundrel with me."

He paused. Though angry still, her story had pacified him. He felt it to be false, none-

theless she had believed it and the fact that she had, absolved her of much that she had done. However she had erred, she had at least tried to do right. He closed and opened a hand, looked at it and from it looked at her.

"But first I will see my mother. In any case I will be here to-morrow. Yes, that's what I'll do. Why shouldn't I come. Why not?"

Leilah did not answer. She did not believe he would come, except to cause fresh agony to them both there was no reason why he should do so. The horror which she had told him and to which incredulously he had listened was gospel to her, an evil gospel, yes, but nonetheless a true one. Besides if he did come as, in any case, he said he would, he might meet Barouffski, and affrightedly she foresaw blows, afterwards a duel—one which she was unaware was then impending.

"Why not?" Verplank repeated, fumbling her as he spoke with suspicious eyes and appearing to divine and to resent her forecast.

She caught at a straw. Usually, between four and seven, Barouffski was tabled at baccarat, gambling with her money. That straw she produced.

"Come at five."

Verplank, appeased, nodded. "Very good, at five then."

But at once she realised that other safeguards were needful. She hesitated, looked about her, looked at Verplank, gave him his hat, motioned to him. Then, preceding him, she passed into an adjoining salon, entered the dining room and moved from it to the garden below.

Passably mystified, he followed.

The air, freighted with fragrance, stirred by music from the church, the dogs, at sight of him, charged suddenly with menaces. Straining at their chains, viciously they clamoured.

Indifferently Verplank glanced from them to the gate beyond, to which Leilah was leading him.

When both reached it, she opened it and said: "Come this way to-morrow, will you?"

For a second he considered her. Her face was as a book in which he could read the reason. In view of many things, particularly of the duel, it seemed to him all very puerile.

But, replacing his hat, grimly he nodded. "Before then I have rather an idea that there may be a deficit among us."

This expression, in itself perhaps over precise, was too much for her and the fact that it was showed itself in her eyes.

Without heeding their inquiry he nodded again. "I will come this way but only that together we may leave by the other."

Again he nodded. In a moment he had gone.

Leilah, closing the gate behind him watched him go. It was, she felt, her last earthly sight of him. There would be no going away together. He would never come back. Never. His mother, if she knew the truth, could only substantiate it. If she did not, another would. Helplessly she held at the gate. A vagrant passed, she did not see. A hawker called, she did not hear. She was not only helpless, she was hopeless. She wished that death really were, that it could beneficently come, take her, shroud her in blankness, in endless oblivion of what was and of what might have been. Long since the dogs, mollified by Verplank's exit, had ceased to bark. Shrilly now from the church came boys' fresh voices. The music of them stirred her a little and she turned.

Before her, framed in a window of the dining room, Barouffski stood. At sight of him she started. Amiably he smiled. When she looked again he had vanished.

But, in a moment, in the doorway beneath, smiling still, he reappeared.

"What a beautiful day, is it not?" Oilily

he rubbed his hands. "You have been having visitors, cara mia?"

As he spoke he moved toward her. Urbanely he continued! "And what did they have to say?"

He was quite near her now and, with his head held a trifle to one side he was regarding her with affectionate indulgence, much as one would regard a child.

"They told you nothing new, cara mia?"

Without looking at him, Leilah shook her head. "Nothing. Nothing at least that I did not know."

Smiling still, indulgent as before, Barouffski plucked at his pointed beard. "And what is that, cara mia?"

Remotely, in a voice without colour, as though speaking not to him at all but only to herself, she answered:

"That I am the most miserable woman in the world."

Barouffski's smile broadened. "Bah! They exaggerated, cara mia. It is the way of the world. Mon Dieu, à qui se fier? You are not at all what they said. You are—how shall I put it—perhaps a bit indiscreet. That is it, a bit indiscreet." He pointed to the bench. "Will you not seat yourself?"

He was still smiling, but the smile wholly

muscular, was one in which the eyes have no part. The "visitors" whom he affected to ridicule, alarmed him. They were, he knew, quite capable of taking Leilah away. Her presence or absence was quite one to him. Only if she departed, so would her purse.

"Will you not?" he repeated.

"I am going in."

"Certainly, cara mia. It is as it pleases you. But——"

At this Leilah, who had passed him, turned.

"Well, what?"

"You see, cara mia, supposing I had visitors. Supposing rather I had a visitor. We are only supposing, are we not? Bon! Supposing this visitor happened to be what we call an ancienne, an old flame, an inamorata of mine. Supposing that were so. Do you know what you could do?"

"No," Leilah from over her shoulder answered. "Nor do I care."

"Forgive me, cara mia. You mean that you do not care to be informed. Yet you should know, for you could if you wished have me fined. Yes, that is what you could do. You could have me fined.

"But I," he resumed. "Do you know in similar circumstances what I could do? Do you know rather what the law says I may do?

Do you, cara mia? Do you? For really you ought to."

But Leilah now was approaching the entrance.

"What!" Barouffski exclaimed. "You are not interested? You are really going?"

As he spoke, he bowed. "Bon, à ce soir, cara mia. And a last word. If I may advise, do not be led into indiscretions."

"Do not," he repeated, while shrilly from the adjacent church came the voices of boys chanting the final phrase of the Pater Noster: *"Sed libera nos a malo."*

"That is it," he called at Leilah's retreating back. "Pray rather to be delivered of them. Otherwise——"

But Leilah now had entered the house.

"Otherwise," he continued to himself and moving to the kennels, patted the dogs, "otherwise a sojourn in Poland may improve you."

IX

"The strawberries were delicious," Violet, the following day, remarked to Leilah.

The two women were seated in the garden of the house in the rue de la Pompe. It was just after luncheon and between them was a table on which coffee had been served. From without came the whirr of passing motors, the cries of those hawkers who are never still. But the garden itself was quiet, scented too and the day superb.

Violet, patting a yawn, resumed: "One never really gets strawberries except in Paris. They are so big! And so expensive, aren't they? I know that in a restaurant a man gave one to the waiter for a tip."

She looked about her. "But, mercy! What can have become of Aurelia? She was to have stopped for me."

"Don't you think it unwise to let her go on the stage?" Leilah, with an air of talking for talk's sake, inquired.

"Let her! But she's got her head. I can't prevent her. She'll never come to any harm though. She isn't the kind to want to do any-

thing she thought was wrong. No indeed. She would never think anything wrong that she wanted to do. But tell me. I could not very well ask before the servants. What are you going to do?"

For a moment Leilah did not answer. Then, a bit resignedly, she folded her hands.

"I do not see that I have the ability to do anything."

The pause, the gesture, the reply, angered Violet. She bristled.

"Don't be so modest, you make me nervous!"

For a moment she also paused. Then, ruminantly, as though in self communion, the lady uttered these cryptic words:

"But perhaps——"

Leilah, who had turned away, turned to her. "Perhaps what?"

But Violet, compressing her lips, assumed the appearance which a very worldly, exquisitely gowned and beautiful Sphinx might present.

"Perhaps what?" Leilah, puzzled by the attitude, repeated.

"Oh, nothing. That is, nothing in particular. I was merely thinking from battle, murder and sudden death, Good Lord deliver us! And yet——"

"Well?"

Violet looked her over. "I know I ought not to tell and for that very reason I will. Your two husbands are to fight to-day. They may be at it now——"

Abruptly she made a face, dropped her voice and threw out:

"No such luck."

In the doorway Barouffski stood.

Leilah had not seen. Inwardly she had shrivelled. To the sudden knowledge that the two men were to fight, fear, as suddenly, superposed the conviction that Verplank would be killed. It stirred in her a wholly animal longing to get away from herself; to be rid, however transiently, of that sense of horror and helplessness which only the tortured know. In an effort to shut out the pain of it, she closed her eyes.

When she opened them, Barouffski was before her. Affably he was addressing her friend.

"Beautiful day, Lady Silverstairs. In London you do not often have such weather. I hope Lord Silverstairs is planning to keep you here a very long time."

"What? What?" Violet in a crescendo of surprise, exclaimed.

Affably, smilingly, unperturbably, Barouffski reiterated the expression of his hope.

Icily Violet cut him short. "With us it is the woman who makes and unmakes plans."

Barouffski, unabashed and smiling, plucked at his beard. "A most excellent custom. Yes. For when has reason governed the world? It is only by the heartstrings that men can be led and women alone can lead them."

But now Violet with the air of an empress had risen. "Leilah, my motor is at the door. Let me take you for a turn in the Bois."

"Do," Barouffski exclaimed, looking as he spoke at Leilah. "You are a trifle pale, cara mia. A turn or two now in the Bois——"

With a gesture he signified, that is what you need.

Turning to Violet he added: "So thoughtful of you, Lady Silverstairs."

In speaking he bowed for Violet now was vacating the garden and Leilah who had risen was following her.

Barouffski bowed again. "Cara mia, a pleasant drive to you."

But, when both women had entered the house, he sighed, sighed with relief, looked about him, consulted his watch, looked again about him, moved to the entrance, touched a bell which presently a footman answered.

Barouffski indicated the table and chairs. "Get all that out of here."

"Perfectly, monsieur le comte," the man, with marked deference, answered and started to do as bidden.

Barouffski checked him. "In five or ten minutes some gentlemen will come by the main entrance. Show them in the reception room. About the same time others will come by the gate. When they do, see that I am notified at once."

"Perfectly, monsieur le comte."

"Afterward, when they are gone, come back here and tidy up."

"Perfectly, monsieur le comte."

But now Barouffski had turned, he was entering the house. The man stuck his tongue out at him. "Canaille, va!" he muttered. Raising his arms, he added: "Tidy up, eh? Tidy up what? The remains of your conversation, no doubt. Bah! That won't be much." He laughed, took first the table, then the chairs, vanished with them and reappeared.

A bell at the gate had sounded, he hurried there and bowing, admitted Aurelia and that young person's young man.

The girl made straight for the kennels. "Parsnips!" she delightedly exclaimed. "Aren't those two big brutes simply dear?"

Swiftly Emmanuel intervened. "Pardon,

they are very savage." Then, as the girl hesitated he added: "Will mademoiselle give herself the trouble to pass into the salon?"

Aurelia tossed her pretty head. "No, I like it here. Besides I hate suggestions. Tell Madame Barouffska that I have come on a most unimportant matter which will probably detain me a very long time."

"Yes," her companion rejoined as the footman retreated. "Yes, I often think that it is only unimportant matters that are really momentous." In his hand was a stick which negligently he twirled. "What is this one, if I may ask?"

"I have forgotten."

"Perhaps then it was really important."

Aurelia, who, with her delicious face and delicate garments, looked like a wayward angel, lifted a finger.

"So it was! So it was! I remember now I wanted to ask her how she likes matrimony."

"Cæsar!" the youth exclaimed. "You are not collecting data on the subject, are you?"

Meekly, with a treacherously innocent air, the girl surveyed him. "You wouldn't wish me to take leaps in the dark, would you?"

"Certainly I would. Certainly I do—since you are to take them with me."

With the same wicked look, Aurelia mois-

tened her lips. "What a beautiful nature you have!"

Pleased at this, the little lord nodded.

"I'll tell you what matrimony is, two souls with but a single thought——"

"Yes," Aurelia interrupted. "Two souls with half a thought apiece." Rapturously she sighed. "There is real bliss!"

Buttercups snarled. "Oh come, now! If you turn everything into ridicule——"

Dreamily Aurelia continued. "I asked the duchess, and she said——"

"The old harridan!"

"You know her manner"—a manner which Aurelia instantly made her own. "My dear, matrimony is three months of adoration, three months of introspection, thirty years of toleration—with the children to begin it all over."

Buttercups frowned. "A rather voluminous definition."

"Rather luminous, I should call it."

Frowning still, Buttercups threw out.

"While you were at it, it's a pity you did not ask her what love is."

But the sarcasm, if sarcasm it were, convulsed Aurelia. "Parsnips!" she delightedly exclaimed. "You'll never believe it! She asked me!"

"Mistook you for an expert," Buttercups, glowering at the beautiful, laughing girl snapped back. "What did you say?"

Aurelia, her eyes sparkling, her little white teeth visible, her little pink tongue also, looked about her, turned, went to the bench, got up on it and there, solemnly now as though on a platform, coughed.

"I said, that while from studies and statistics I was inclined to believe that, theoretically, love is a fermentation of the molecules of the imagination, actually it is the affection of somebody else."

Blankly Buttercups stared. "I don't understand that."

Aurelia coughed again. "I added that from the same studies and statistics I was also inclined to believe that love is the tragedy of those who lack it, the boredom of those who don't."

"Eh?" Buttercups whined. "I don't understand that either."

"I further stated that love is a specific emotion, more or less exclusive in selection, more —or less—permanent in duration and due to a mental disturbance, in itself caused by a law of attraction which somebody or other said was the myth of happiness, invented by the devil for man's despair."

Helplessly Buttercups groaned. "I don't understand that at all."

With birdlike ease Aurelia hopped from the bench and with consoling delicacy nodded:

"Violet said she didn't either."

Buttercups brightened. "Now there's a woman of sense."

Very sweetly Aurelia nodded again. "Leilah Barouffska said she did understand, so I may suppose that she is stupid."

At the shot—which missed him—Buttercups tormented the tip of his nose.

"No doubt, she does seem to have made a mess of things. Why now did she leave her first husband?"

Aurelia looked down and away.

"It is not a thing I could mention."

Buttercups gave a little jump. "What?"

Perversely, her lovely eyes still lowered, Aurelia added:

"She caught him in the act."

Buttercups jumped again.

Aurelia blushed or rather appeared to do so. "With her own eyes she saw him eating fish with his knife."

But Buttercups had rallied. "Now, Aurelia," he protested, "I have heard too many lies about myself, too many confounded lies, to believe any such story."

Superciliously, her delicate nose in the air, Aurelia looked him over. "Ah, indeed! But then you see sensible people never object to the lies that are told about them. What we do object to is the truth. Now when we are married—if we ever are——"

"Aurelia," the poor devil pathetically interrupted, "you never say when we are married without adding if we ever are!"

"That's to teach you not to take things for granted. I have been engaged before—and may be again."

"B-before!" the flustered Buttercups stuttered. "A-again!"

Frostily this ingénue considered the youth. "Parsnips, don't look at me in that fashion, you inflame me."

She cocked an ear. "What's that?"

At the gate the bell was ringing and unperceived by either Emmanuel had reappeared. The footman was descending the garden. Midway he stopped.

"I have the honour to inform mademoiselle that madame la comtesse is momentarily awaited."

He bowed, moved on, opened the gate through which then a brief procession passed: —Silverstairs, a green bag under his arm; de

Fresnoy, a stick under his; an old man with a small valise; finally Verplank.

Verplank, raising his hat, approach Aurelia. De Fresnoy, after saluting the young woman, addressed the old man.

But Silverstairs, sidling up to Buttercups and indicating Aurelia, whispered:

"Get her away, there's to be a fight."

"The deuce there is!" Buttercups exclaimed.

For a moment he looked helplessly about and made a little futile gesture. "If I ask her to go she'll stay."

Silverstairs pulled at his moustache. "Then tell her to stay and she'll go."

But such strategy was needless. Aurelia had no intention of loitering among these men, not one of whom interested her remotely. With a glimpse of her pretty teeth to Verplank and a nod at the others, she passed, followed by Buttercups, through the gate which the footman held open.

Meanwhile the dogs were barking and, from the house beyond, Barouffski appeared. With him were friends of his, Palencia, Tyszkiewicz; also a young man with a serious face who, like the old man, had with him a case which gingerly he put on the ground.

Verplank glanced at them, went to the bench and began removing his coat.

The night before he had dreamed pleasurably, as the great beasts of the jungles dream, of blood and the joy of killing. He had dreamed also and less agreeably that Leilah's story was true. However he had denied it, he did not know but that it might be. Nonetheless he doubted. He doubted it for the most human of reasons, because he wanted to. He doubted it for another and a better reason, because his intuitions so prompted. He had yet another reason, one less valid perhaps but cogent, the dissimilarity between Leilah and himself. The contrast was so marked that they might have come of alien races, from different zones.

On leaving her house other differences had occurred to him, differences not physical but moral. It is ridiculous, he had told himself. Nonetheless he dreamed that the story was true.

Meanwhile the parliamentaries had not been entirely successful. The note dispatched from Voisins had resulted that evening in a conference between Verplank's seconds and Barouffski's. These latter, Tyszkiewicz and Palencia, had begun by insisting that it was their principal who was aggrieved, that Verplank, in attempting to address a lady whom he knew did not wish to speak to him, had been wholly

at fault and was deprived in consequence of the choice of weapons.

To this de Fresnoy had objected that Verplank knew nothing of the kind, that in addressing or in attempting to address the lady, he had acted in accordance with the usages of the world: moreover assuming him to have been in error in thinking that the lady did not object to being addressed, her slightest indication to the contrary would have been supersufficient to make him desist, the result being that Barouffski's intervention reflected on his good-breeding and was therefore an insult.

This view of the matter Barouffski's seconds refused to accept. They represented that it were difficult for the lady to have more punctiliously informed Verplank of her disinclination to be addressed by him than she had already done in obtaining a divorce.

At the easy logic de Fresnoy laughed. According to him, all that was beside the issue. He declared that many divorced couples were better friends afterward than they had found it possible to be before. In support of the statement he cited history: he cited the case of Henri IV and the Reine Margot. He did more than cite, he quoted the chronicles of Pierre l'Estoile, and he insisted that if his view

were not accepted the conference must dissolve and an arbiter be convened.

In face of these arguments advanced to provincials by a Parisian, advanced too with that tone of authority which only a man sure of his ground or of his assurance may maintain and advanced, moreover, to men not over sure of their own, the latter hesitated.

Then, as though to demonstrate the truth of the parodox of which de Fresnoy had delivered himself at Voisins, the quip that a man is rarely killed except by his seconds, Silverstairs who, thus far throughout the conference, had smoked in placid silence, suddenly stuck his oar in.

"Why not toss for it?"

Tyszkiewicz and Palencia, hesitating still, agreed. A coin was flipped, heads for Verplank, tails for Barouffski. Tails it was. Barouffski was accorded the choice of arms, foils were designated by his seconds and the meeting was arranged to be held in his garden, at two the next day.

Verplank would have preferred pistols. But, informed of the result, he dreamed pleasurably. The encounter was the main thing. Presently sleep sank him deeper. Life and death ceased to be. He became part of the inchoate and primordial. Then, from the voids

in which he lay, lightly, delicately, imperceptibly, an artery reached and drew him. But his scattered selves, the objective, subjective, superjective, satisfied with their temporary decentralisation, resisted. In the subtle struggle a memory, catalogued Leilah, was aroused. The syllables of the name resounded remotely, like a damp drum beaten obscurely behind the shelves of thought. They conveyed no meaning and, before they could suggest any, they passed, drifted by the currents of unconsciousness. But at once, those currents, barred by assembling ideas broke to the murmur of the vocables—Leilah! Leilah! Other memories, incidents, possibilities eddied among them and the sleeper, awakening, found himself confronted by the tragic mystery which the name revived.

Immediately the picture that had formed itself before him at Voisins returned. From it the Why had gone but the obstacle remained, and, as he got from the bed, he promised himself to demolish it.

Now, in the hostile enclosure, as the dogs barked and Barouffski appeared, Verplank removed his coat, undid his collar, rolled up his sleeves.

Beside him, bending over a case, the old man mumbled. He was a surgeon. The hour

was not to his liking. He believed in duels, they were a source of revenue to him, but he believed in fighting on an empty stomach and, in the afternoon, who had that?

He looked up at Verplank. "Monsieur, you are young, you are brave, I doubt not you are also adroit. But had I been you, when your seconds asked, as I may suppose they asked: 'Which shall it be, the pistol at twenty paces or the sword?' I would have said to them: 'Give me the sword at twenty paces.' Yes; that is what I would have said."

Verplank ignored him utterly. In the center of the garden the seconds grouped together, were concluding details. Beyond, near the house, Barouffski stood. He also was now bare-armed. Near him, emptying a case, was the young man with the serious face. Beside him, placed upright against a wall, were two long green bags. From the street came the usual rumble, the noise of motors, the cries of hawkers, the snorting of stallions, the clatter of hoofs.

Silverstairs, abandoning the others went over to Verplank.

"De Fresnoy has been chosen director."

Verplank, from his trowsers pocket, had taken a pair of gloves. The palm of one of them, previously moistened, had been dusted

with rosin. Now, as he put it on, he looked across at Barouffski who was looking at him. The man's bare arms were hairy and the sight of them was repugnant to Verplank. At once all the jealousy, all the hate of the male, mounted like wine to his head. He coloured, his hand shook. Then, resolutely, he reacted. In a moment he had again control of himself and it was idly, with an air of indifference, as he finished with his glove, that, in reference to the dinner that evening, he said:

"Are you to have many people to-night?"

Silverstairs, delighted that Verplank, showing up in such form, should be so sure of the result, laughed. "No, it is to be small and early. Afterward we go on to a play. The missis has a box for something, the Gymnase I think."

Verplank bent over and turned up the ends of his trowsers. A moment before he had been considering methods of attack, in particular a direct riposte after a certain parade and it was springingly, as though delivering it, that he straightened.

But now de Fresnoy approached. Silverstairs moved to one side where he was joined by Tyszkiewicz, a thin, tall man with a prominent nose and an air vaguely pedagogic, and by Palencia who, with great black eyebrows

that met and a full black beard, looked like Fra Diavolo disguised as a clubman.

From one of the long green bags de Fresnoy had taken a pair of foils. These he offered, hilt foremost, to Verplank who grasped one and then to gauge its temper, or his own, lashed the air with it. The movement revealed a suppleness of arm, a muscular ease, the swelling biceps which training alone provides.

Save Barouffski, no one noticed. For a moment his eyes shifted absently. It was as though he too had meditated a coup and now was meditating another. Meanwhile he also had received a foil.

"Messieurs!" de Fresnoy called. He spoke in a loud, clear voice. He had moved back and stood at an angle to Barouffski and Verplank. Opposite, at an equal angle were the seconds and surgeons. All now were so stationed that they formed a sort of cross.

"Messieurs, I do not need to remind you of the common loyalty to be observed. What I have to say is that the encounter will proceed in engagements of three minutes, followed each by three minutes of repose, until one of you is incapacitated."

De Fresnoy looked from Barouffski to Verplank. At once in his loud, clear voice he called:

"On guard!"

The two men fell into position. De Fresnoy moved forward, took in either hand the foils at the points, drew them together until they met, left them so and moved back.

"Allez, messieurs!"

At the word Allez, or, in English, go, and without waiting for the term Messieurs that followed, instantly Barouffski lunged. His foil pierced Verplank in the cheek and touched the upper jaw.

Verplank had a vision of a footman peering from a window, a taste of something hot and acrid in his mouth, a sense of pain, the sensation of vulperine fury.

De Fresnoy's face had grown red as his neckcloth. He branished his stick.

"Monsieur!" he cried at Barouffski. "Your conduct is odious. You shall answer to me for it."

Barouffski bowed. "For the expression which it has pleased you to employ, you shall answer to me."

"Permit me! Permit me!" Tyszkiewicz interjected. "To what do you object?"

Angrily de Fresnoy turned at him. "Your principal drew before the order. He——"

"Permit me! Permit me!" Tyszkiewicz interrupted. "The word Allez is an order. The

moment it is uttered hostilities begin. The term Messieurs is but a polite accessory, a term which may or may not be employed."

Insolently de Fresnoy considered him. "I have no lessons to receive from you."

"Permit me! Permit me——"

But de Fresnoy had turned on his heel. Before him Verplank stood, Silverstairs on one side, the old surgeon on the other. The young surgeon had joined them. Beyond, Barouffski was examining the point of his foil.

From Verplank's mouth and face blood was running. The wound had not improved his appearance. The old surgeon, on tiptoes, was staunching it.

"What I like," he confided, speaking the while very unctuously as though what he was saying would be a comfort to Verplank; "what I like is to attend to gentlemen whose wives have deceived them. Outraged husbands, monsieur, that is my specialty!"

Verplank brushed him aside, shook his foil, and called at de Fresnoy.

"Are the three minutes up?"

"Monsieur!" the old surgeon protested.

The young surgeon intervened.

"But, monsieur——"

De Fresnoy motioned at them.

"Is he in a condition to continue?"

"Why not?" Verplank scornfully replied.

He raised his left hand, and, with a gesture of excuse, turned and spat. He looked up. His mouth was on fire, his jaw burned, the wound in his cheek was a flame. Yet these things but added to the intensity of his eyes. They blazed. There was blood on his face, on his chin, on his shirt, on his feet. He was hideous. But he was a man, and a mad one.

"He ought to be horsewhipped," muttered Silverstairs, glaring as he spoke at Barouffski, who was talking to his seconds.

"On guard, then!" called de Fresnoy.

"Permit me, permit me," cried Tyszkiewicz. "The point of my principal's sword is broken."

"Give him another then," de Fresnoy roughly threw out. Insolently he added: "And teach him how to use it." In a moment, when from the other bag, a foil had been got and measured, "On guard," he repeated.

Again he united the foils. Again he gave the command.

For a moment the weapons clashed.

Suddenly and excitedly Palencia cried: "My principal is touched."

"Halt," de Fresnoy, intervening with raised stick, commanded.

Verplank moved back. "Damn him," he muttered, "I haven't done with him yet."

About Barouffski now, Palencia and the young man with the serious face had come. The latter was examining Barouffski's right arm. On it a thin red line was visible. Very gravely the young man looked up.

"My client is disabled. Profound incision in the region of the flexor digitorum sublimis accompanied by a notable effusion of blood."

The old surgeon chuckled. Confidentially as before he addressed Verplank. "I know that term. It means a scratch. Those ladies there, it must amuse even them."

As he spoke he indicated a window at which Violet and Leilah had appeared, but from which now Leilah was retreating.

Verplank did not hear, did not see. The young surgeon, resuming, had announced himself as opposed to a continuation of the encounter. It was this that preoccupied Verplank.

Loudly and angrily he cried: "Let's have pistols then. That man can use his left hand and I'll do the same.

"Cristi! La jolie dame!" the old surgeon muttered to himself.

In the doorway Leilah had come. Hurriedly she moved to Verplank. As she did so Barouffski tried to prevent her.

"Cara mia, I must beg of you——"

He had got in her way but she eluded him, while the other men looked curiously at this woman who now agitatedly was addressing Verplank.

"Don't fight any more, don't!"

Roughly Verplank answered: "I haven't begun."

"Sir," cried Barouffski. "I can permit no conversation with this lady."

Verplank ignoring Barouffski as utterly as he had ignored the surgeon, looked at Leilah.

"That story of yours is——"

But whatever he may have intended to say, Barouffski interrupted. He was shouting at Verplank, calling, too, at Leilah whom he had got by the arm and whom he would have drawn away, but this Verplank prevented. Shifting his foil to his left hand, with his right he seized Barouffski and with a twist which separated him from Leilah, shoved him aside.

"To your shambles!" he called at him.

But already the others were intervening. Tyszkiewicz with his eternal "Permit me," got between the two men. Palencia held Barouffski by the shoulder. Silverstairs drew Verplank away, while de Fresnoy, viewing the situation as hopeless, declared the duel at an end.

The actions of all were practically so simultaneous that they were as one to Leilah who, bewildered by the confusion which she herself had caused, horrified by Verplank's appearance and tortured by the riddle of his interrupted words, now, over the heads of the others, again called to him:

"You say that the story is——"

"At five!" Verplank threw back.

Barouffski, bursting with rage and impotence, shouted:

"I say this conversation must cease."

The old surgeon, nudging his colleague, laughed:

"There is my specialty!"

Both surgeons then were occupied with their bags. De Fresnoy, overhearing the remark, could not but smile. To conceal it he turned to the gate where he was joined by Silverstairs and where at once, Palencia and Tyszkiewicz followed, leaving in the center of the garden Leilah and her two husbands, one of whom with a shrug which for an American was perhaps rather French, went to the bench where his coat lay.

In this instance again the actions of all so closely coincided that barely an instant intervened before Leilah was throwing after Verplank the two syllables he had thrown at her.

"At five!"

Later she was unconscious of having done so. But Barouffski heard and presently, when the others had gone and in this garden those two were alone, with angry suspicion he confronted her.

"Five! What is that? What does it mean?"

Leilah had turned to go. A bit unsteadily she moved on, reached the entrance, leaned there for support.

But Barouffski was at her heels.

"Five," he repeated. "He said it, you said it, what does it mean?"

"It means that God willing some day I may have peace."

She had half-turned. She turned again. In a moment she had gone.

Menacingly Barouffski's eyes followed her. "That's what five means, does it?"

Then he too turned. Nearby, on the marble chair, were his coat and waistcoat. Slowly, thoughtfully, he put them on. As he did so he noticed the dogs. It may have seemed to him then that they were his only friends. Longly he looked their way.

Suddenly, as though illumination had come, he touched a bell and looked up at Leilah's window.

After a brief delay, Emmanuel appeared.

"Shut the gate," Barouffski ordered.

"Perfectly, monsieur le comte," the footman very deferentially replied and started to do as bidden.

Barouffski checked him. Indicating the lower window, he added:

"At five or thereabouts be in there. I will tell you then what to do. You hear me?"

"Perfectly, monsieur le comte."

Again Barouffski glanced at the upper window. As he glanced he smiled.

"Cara mia, five may mean more things than you say, more even than you think."

He was still smiling but it was not a pleasant smile to see.

Beneath his breath, Emmanuel, who was looking at him, muttered:

"Quelle gueule de maquereau!"

X

"Gracious!" Violet exclaimed. She had been smoking and now in putting a cigarette in a cendrier she had succeeded in overturning it. Undismayed she looked at a clock. "Gracious!" she repeated. "Since that stupid duel, I have sat here an hour."

Leisurely the lady arose. She was a glowing object in this room which, filled with costly futilities and furnished in canary and black, otherwise was Empire and brilliant. The main entrance, hung with heavy portières of yellow damask had, opposite it, across the room, a tapestry panel which masked a spiral stairway that led below. To one side, at an elaborate table, which now the overturned cendrier had strewn with ashes, Leilah was seated. Behind her, through an open window, shone the eager sun. Before her, rising from a sofa was her friend.

Leilah wished that she would go, wished too that she would stay, wished rather—as at times we all wish of those who are near us—that she were different, less mondaine perhaps, more simple. To Violet, the spectacle in the

garden had been tedious. To Leilah it was horrible. Moreover the atmosphere of blood and hate, the enigma of Verplank's words, the menaces of Barouffski's eyes, these things frightened her, inducing a dread which seemed to brood not in the mind but in the body. She could have put a hand to her girdle and have said: "It is here." In addition she felt—as in every spiritual crisis we all do —alone. Of this she could not tell Violet. She felt that she lacked the power to express it and that Violet lacked the ability to understand. Pain has accents which only its graduates know. Violet, in all her brilliant life, had never shed a poignant tear.

"What do you propose to do now?" the lady was asking.

Cheerlessly Leilah replied: "My duty."

Here was something which Violet did understand. Brightly she nodded.

"Yes, and I may tell you that it is your duty to preserve your looks and avoid a scandal. I did not at all like your fantasia in the garden. A gentlewoman never does anything important and that was an important thing. In no time it will be all over the place. You can believe that, can't you?"

"I don't know what to believe."

Violet laughed. "I always believe what I

like. That I find so satisfactory. Apropos. What was that story about which Verplank was shouting? Mercy! I could have heard him a mile away."

In weary protest Leilah shook her head. "You know I can't tell you."

"The same old thing, was it? But how antiquated you are! Really it is piteous. There are no secrets any more. All that sort of thing went out with hoopskirts. Private life which used to be a sealed book has become an open newspaper. It is plain for instance, plain to everybody, plain as a pikestaff that you are still in love with Verplank. What you left him for the Lord in his infinite wisdom and mercy only knows. That is a secret certainly but only because you choose to make it one. It is no secret to me though that you are dying to go back to him. But don't you know you can't? Don't you know it? Don't you know that you can't budge an inch until you have shipped Barouffski? Now how are you going to do that? Tell me."

Leilah made a pass with a hand. It was as though, in some rite known but to her, she were consulting the lap of the invisible gods and, in it, the equally invisible future.

"Then I will tell you. You have got to buy him off. Listen to this. I will pack Silver-

stairs straight to the Embassy. There he will get all the law and most of the prophets. Meanwhile promise that you'll keep your head."

"I will try," Leilah, mechanically, her thoughts afar, replied.

"There!" Violet exclaimed. "That's right. When there is a divorce in the air it's so much better to try than to be tried."

At the inane jest she laughed, embraced her friend. In a moment she had gone, distributing as she went a faint, sweet smell of orris.

Leilah who had risen moved to the window and looked out at the gate through which Verplank would come. It was as she had said: She did not know what to believe and mutely for a moment she prayed for guidance.

"O, Lords of Karma, Watchers of the Seven Spheres, grant me so to live that, hereafter, I may say, I have harmed no heart, I have made no one weep. Out of your infinite bounty grant that somewhere, sometime, there may be peace to Gulian's soul and mine."

The prayer concluded she felt securer. Momentarily the cancer of anxiety had ceased to gnaw, the fascination of fear had departed. In the respite she turned to the clock. It was nearly five and she rang for one of her women.

"Parker," she began, when the servant appeared.

"Yes, my lady."

"Presently, in a few minutes, a gentleman will come by the gate. Be there and bring him here. Bring him through the dining room and up the back way. If possible, I prefer that no one should see him."

"Yes, my lady. Thank your ladyship."

At once, with that air which those acquire who attended to delicate matters, the woman drew aside the tapestry that masked the stair, which then discreetly, almost atiptoe, she descended.

As the tapestry fell again, instantly there returned to Leilah the sense of evil and impending ill. The brilliant room seemed full of terrors. In each bright corner a danger lurked. So strong was the impression that she felt it must be she was being warned, that she was being visited by those obscure phenomena which occultists call impacts from the astral, and that these were urging her to go, to meet Verplank without, in the garden, in the street, anywhere except in this fastidiousness.

Coerced by the impression, she entered an adjoining room, got there a fichu which she put on her head, a light wrap which she drew about her. Excited as she was, unaided as

well, it took several minutes before she could find these accouterments. When, at last equipped, she re-entered the sitting room, she started.

Before her, his hat on, one side of his face medallioned with courtplaster, stood Verplank.

At sight of Leilah, he removed his hat which he tossed on the sofa and said at once and simply enough:

"That story of yours is false as Judas."

"Gulian!" At the moment it was all she found, but then fancy a blind man dazzled.

Verplank nodded. "Yes. The letters you received at Coronado—there were three of them, were there not? three written on gray paper each signed Effingham Verplank?—well, my father wrote them, that's true enough, but he wrote them to your aunt, your mother's sister, Hilda Hemingway. Did you never hear that the governor had an affair with her? Did you?"

Leilah's face spoke for her. From the bewilderment there, it was obvious that of it all she was ignorant.

With an uplift of the chin Verplank considered her.

"That's odd, girls generally only hear what they ought not to. However, Hemingway be-

came suspicious—for very good reasons, no doubt, or, if you prefer, for very bad ones—the result being that his wife turned the letters over for safe keeping to your mother. When she died your father found them. He did not stop there, he showed them to my mother. My mother knew the facts, but she said your father was so convinced of your mother's infidelity that it seemed a pity to disabuse him. Those were her very words to me to-day."

"Gulian!" Still Leilah found but that. Visibly the light was there. As yet she could not credit it.

Again, but now appreciatively, Verplank nodded. "Yes. I know. It does seem queer. But then my mother is not the ordinary woman. She thought the governor so created to conquer that it no more occurred to her to sit in judgment on his victims than it occurred to her to sit on him. In the true spirit of Christian charity she overlooked it all."

Verplank paused, opened and closed a hand. "It was not matrimony perhaps, but it was magnificent," he obliging resumed, forgetting wholly that it was not in him to do likewise.

"Come," he added. From the start, Leilah's apparel, the fichu and wrap, had made him fancy that she was as ready to go as he was to

take her and it all seemed very simple. "Come. Let's be off. I have a cab for you."

But at the suggestion which was a command she undid the lace, loosened the cloak.

"Gulian, I cannot."

"Cannot!" he angrily repeated. "Why can't you? Have you not heard what I said. You are not my sister, you are my wife. Come."

"Gulian! You do not know what you ask!"

"I know perfectly well. If you hesitate it is because you do not believe me. But would I urge you if that malignity were true? Would I?"

"Gulian, no, you would not."

"There! You see! You have to believe me."

"It is not that."

"It is the divorce then! But you are no more married to that dismal cad than I am to one of your maids. Except in Nevada the decree has no effect whatever. But without bothering to have it set aside, come with me and let this saurian get another."

"Gulian, yes, but for the moment surely you can see that this is impossible."

"Impossible! There is nothing impossible. Why do you say so? Why do you make so many objections? You should not make any.

You hear a cock-and-bull story, take it for gospel, run away, get a divorce, marry a damned scoundrel and, when you find the story is a brutal lie, stick like a leech to him."

"Gulian, if you but knew. My position is horrible——"

She wanted to tell him that she was in a prison replete with tortures, one from which she was as eager to go as he was to take her, yet one from which she could not escape through the open door of sinning.

He gave her no time. Instantly he interrupted her.

"I know your position, it is all of your own making, too. By God, you can make up your mind to one thing. You'll come, if I have to take you."

As he spoke he looked so brutal that she shrank.

"Gulian, you will kill me. I thought so before. I know it now."

"It is only what you deserve."

"Gulian! And you said you loved me!"

"Yes, but you make me doubt it."

The wrap which previously she had loosened she let fall on a chair beside her and put the fichu on the table.

"Gulian, you must give me time."

The words were simple, plaintively uttered,

but her action with the cloak and lace, gave them an emphasis which added to his irritation.

"Nonsense," he retorted. "You have had time enough. Now you must act." Roughly he considered her. "Anyone else might think you cared for that——"

"Gulian, in all the world you know I love but you."

Verplank raised the cloak, reached for the fichu.

"Put these on, then, and come."

But Leilah, with a gesture that was less of resistance than of appeal, motioned them from her. The gesture infuriated him. He threw the cloak about her.

"By God! You shall put them on. What's more, you will come whether or not you want to."

As he spoke he seized her, lifted her.

To Leilah it seemed as though she were about to be carried off violently, like a prey. Unresistingly she raised her face to his.

"Gulian, kill me. It will be better; it will end it all."

Something, the words, the tone in which they were uttered, the helplessness of them and of her; but, more than anything else perhaps, the fact that as he held her he felt her tremble,

stayed him. He put her down. His arms fell from her.

Catching again at the chair she steadied herself, and added:

"But if I am to live and love you, be patient. Gulian, if you would stop to think, to realise, you would be patient, you——"

He started from her. "You don't mean——"

At the question and its insinuation, hotly she flushed. Verplank saw but the flush. The day previous she had told him that she had taken Barouffski to serve as a barricade between them. Since then he had cajoled his imagination with the idea that the creature stood to her as husbands do on the stage, show entities who, the rôle performed, cease otherwise to be husbands. Now the idea seemed to him hideously naïf. The flush refuted it. It did more. It revealed not only other relations but the result of them. Instantly he divined that it was for this that she refused to go. At once within him waked the primitive, the aboriginal self that lurks always and, save in the high crises of the emotions, sleeps always within us all. He was in that condition in which men slay with bare hands and afterward consider them marvelingly, wondering at whose command they could have worked. Perspiration came to his forehead, started about his

nose and mouth. With the fichu which he held he wiped them, but on the table from which he had taken it was a layer of dust and ashes, the refuse of the cendrier which Violet had overturned. It streaked his face, griming him with a mask comic and sinister.

With that mask, he called at her.

"Then may you be forever damned."

The malediction passed from him, reached her, shook her. She held to the chair for support. Then indignantly she protested.

"Gulian!"

He did not hear. An idea had come to him, one that had visited him in Melbourne, again in New York, to desist from further effort, to leave her where she was, behind the barriers she had raised. At the moment he believed he desired her no longer, loved her no more, had never loved her at all. Occupied with the idea he looked at this woman who had ruined her life, ruined his own.

She had been saying something, what he did not know nor, self-centered in his anger, did he care.

In his pocket was a revolver. He felt of it and infuriatedly cried:

"You ought to be shot."

"Gulian!"

"You are on a par with the beast you took up with."

"I took his name, Gulian, his name alone."

It was her turn to be angry. The flush had gone, she was pale again and she had abandoned the chair's support. She stood upright, confronting him with that purity which was hers.

"I have no more been his wife than I was yours."

"What!"

This time he heard. But her words, conflicting with his thoughts, rolled over together. In this mental confusion he stared.

"What!"

"It is as I tell you."

"You swear it?"

"Do I need to?"

Still he stared. Truth which acts on us and in us like a chemical precipitate was disclosing to him her whiteness and its own.

"Do I?" she repeated.

"No, by God, you don't. I believe you. I can't help myself. It is in your eyes."

He paused and awkwardly added:

"Forgive me."

Faintly and sadly she smiled.

"Will you?" he asked.

"Kiss me."

In the unique syllables of the words, which in a woman's mouth are so fluid, there was a forgiveness so entire and a love so great that in passionate contrition he drew her to him. Longly their lips met. She closed her eyes, opened them, disengaged herself, moved back a step and looked at him. For the first time she noticed the grime on his face. It did not astonish. It seemed natural after what they had both been through and it occurred to her that her own appearance might be equally bizarre.

Briefly then, in this lull in the storm, she told him what Violet had suggested—the buying and divorce of Barouffski.

"That will take time," he objected. "The shortest way 'round is the quickest way out. If you had not interfered in the garden——"

A gesture completed the sentence.

"No matter," he grimly added. "I haven't done with him yet."

In speaking he had crossed the room, now he recrossed it.

Imploringly Leilah approached him.

"Gulian, not that, not that! Don't fight with him again. Don't, I beseech you. It is not alone that anything of the kind is so horrible but he is one of the trickiest swordsmen here.

Think what that means! Think what would become of me if—if——"

From the pocket of his coat Verplank had taken the revolver. He looked at it, looked at her, replaced it.

"I am a trifle interested in the matter myself. Besides, there are other weapons than the foil. If I can shoot pigeons—and I believe I can—I ought to be able to land a buzzard."

At sight of the revolver Leilah had winced. Now she cried:

"Give it to me!"

Verplank, amused at her simplicity, smiled.

"That isn't a dueling pistol."

"But you never carried one before."

"In the States I did not need to. Here, in Paris, particularly at night, the streets are seldom sure. I have this thing for protection."

"Promise me then——"

Verplank looked her over.

"Don't be a fool."

But as he looked, suddenly she started and he saw that she was trembling.

"What the deuce is the matter?"

Trembling still, peeringly now she had turned to the portières.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"I am so frightened."

"Frightened? What at?"

Uncertainly, her head drawn back as a deer's is when surprised, she glanced about her. Slowly then her eyes returned to his.

"I am so frightened!"

"Yes, but at what?"

She motioned at the room. "Before you came there seemed to be something here, something around me and just now——"

"Well?"

"I heard something."

"Your maid probably."

With an intake of the breath she raised a finger and for a moment both were silent.

"There is no one," he presently told her. "And what if there were!"

At the idea, he laughed.

The laugh, succeeding the silence, while intended to reassure her, did not wholly succeed. She turned to him anew and in a low voice, said:

"You must go. To-morrow come to Violet's."

"I dine there to-night."

"Yes, I know. Tell her that to-morrow, say at three, we will both be with her. Then she can tell us——"

But Verplank had drawn her to him. Again her eyes closed.

"Go," she said at last.

On the sofa was his hat. He reached for it. While he did so, she moved to the tapestry, raised it, disclosing the stair up which he had come.

"To-morrow, then," he said, as he entered there.

She nodded at him. "At three!"

Dropping the tapestry she turned, but very quickly, for again she heard or thought she heard a noise.

Across the room the portières were parting. Through them Barouffski appeared.

"I might have known it," she told herself, and realising that he had been listening, she realised also that the opportunity was as good as another for making an offer which she had in mind.

These ideas, instantaneous at sight of him, were for the moment stayed. On turning she had seen but the man. Now hastening toward her was a creature with an expression so venomous that instinctively, in search of help, with the idea of calling to Verplank, she turned to the tapestry again.

Quicker than she, he caught and tossed her spinning on the sofa. Then, running to the open window, he shouted from it:

"Emmanuel! The dogs!"

Leilah, falling backward on the lounge, was

too stunned to hear. But she steadied herself, recovered, got to her feet and making again for the stair, called at Barouffski:

"Free me from you and you shall have half of what I have."

"Half!" he repeated. At once he was upon her. "All," he cried. "I want it all, all of yours and all of his."

As he spoke he struck her, shoved her aside, raised the tapestry and vanished. For a second she heard him hastening down, while at once from without came the barking of dogs, the jar of oaths, the sound of cries.

What it meant she did not know. Her head was whirling. The fall, the blow, the indignity of both clouded and confused her. From without the uproar mounted and suddenly, the uproar prompting, into the turmoil that was her mind, a gleam of understanding shot. At the apperception of it she shrieked, ran to the window where she shrieked again. The loosened dogs had sprung at Verplank, who, overwhelmed had fallen.

Again she shrieked. Answering the shriek, mingling with it, were snarls, the gnashing of fangs, the din of great hounds ferociously struggling for blood, tearing vehemently at flesh, at a flesh, though, that rebelled.

Verplank rose up between them. With a

kick he sent one of them sprawling. But, in the recoil, torn at by the other hound, he stumbled. The dog was at his throat. In protection he held his left arm against it. With his right hand he got at the revolver in his pocket, and, through the pocket, fired twice into the brute. Gnashing still, it rolled away.

But now, from the other side, the second hound was on him. He saw its eyes, felt its breath, felt its fangs. Again he fired. As he did so, his hand relaxed. He heard a woman shrieking, the sound of hurrying feet. The wall before him mounted. His senses scattered into night.

Suddenly the garden was filled with people. Through the gate, two sergents de ville had come. These, forms furtive and uncertain followed. From the house, led by Barouffski, the footmen ran. Above, from the window, still there issued a woman's shrieks.

Barouffski stopped, and turned. He looked up at the window. He smiled. With one hand he tapped his breast, with the other he pointed at Verplank. Then, in French, reassuringly, he called:

"My dear! See! You may be tranquil. I, I am unharmed. It is the robber."

At the ignominy of that flouting jeer, Leilah, impelled by the impulse to do something,

though it were but to beat her head against a wall, rushed from the window, and, strangling with spasms, fled out of the room and down the stair, where horror so suffocatingly enveloped her that in it her brain tipped, and she fell.

XI

In the golden half light of the Opéra, a chorus, soprano voices on one side of the stage alternating with contralto on the other, vaporised the subtle sensuality of the scene.

Violet Silverstairs, turning to her husband, who was seated behind her, remarked:

"How much better the Italian school is than the French."

Silverstairs, ignorant of either, and indifferent to both, promenaded his glass about the house.

"I wonder why Tempest doesn't show up? There is Marie de Fresnoy! I saw de Fresnoy to-day for the first time since his duel with Barouffski. What a ridiculous affair that was! I suppose one of these days he will have another with d'Arcy."

Violet turned to him again.

"Because of Marie? How absurd you are! D'Arcy doesn't interest her. No man could unless he drove at her with a four-in-hand, and d'Arcy has nothing."

Silverstairs, still promenading his glass, exclaimed:

"There he is now!"

"Who? D'Arcy?"

"Yes, with the Helley-Quetgens, in that box between the columns. Isn't that your friend Leilah whom he is talking to? By Jove, it is, and Barouffski is there, also."

Violet, who had also been promenading her glass, put it down.

"Well, he ought to be. I do think she has acted scandalously. What is said at the club?"

"About Verplank? It is forgotten already. Barouffski, you know, claimed that it was a mistake, and as it appears that Verplank agreed with him, as from neither the one nor the other any charge was forthcoming, the police could do nothing but get Verplank back to the Ritz."

Impatiently Violet unfurled her fan.

"Yes, where she has been every day; every day, that is, when she has not been with d'Arcy."

The statement was inexact. Leilah had indeed been at the Ritz but d'Arcy she had seen but once, momentarily, by accident—if there be such a thing, in any event through one of those seeming hazards which, however fortuitous at first, afterward appear to have been designed. It was a little, though, before Leilah took that view of things. Meanwhile, when,

on recovering from her swoon, she learned that Verplank had also recovered she realised with thanksgiving that Destiny which has its tyrannies has its mercies as well. So soon then as she could get from the bed into which the horrors of the midspring nightmare had thrown her, she went to the Ritz where she found Verplank amply attended, abundantly bandaged, severely but not dangerously hurt.

"One of the brutes nearly chewed my arm off," he told her. "If the other omitted to eat me entirely, it was not because he did not try. I did for them, though," he added, and smiled as he said it. After the manner of man, he took comfort in the feat.

"But not for the worst brute," Leilah answered wishing in spite of herself, wishing instinctively and even ungrammatically that some good fate might.

From beneath a bandage, Verplank laughed:

"Bah! I'll do for him, too."

But Leilah did not hear. She was speaking to the surgeon, whom—with a bravery which in itself was a little defiant, and which in any event might have been more discreet—thereafter, daily and openly, she supplied with that which every surgeon wants, a nurse obedient,

attentive, skilful, alert, and who, in addition ministers for love.

Presently, Verplank was able to be up. The surgeon said that in a day he would be able to be out. Verplank, who knew as much without being told, asked Leilah to go with him on the morrow.

Leilah refused. Verplank, for an invalid, became then surprisingly demoniac. The demonism of him affected her less than a conception, feminine perhaps but erroneous, of her own selfishness. If she went, she knew beforehand that irremissibly she would be dishonoured. But she knew also that any sense of dishonour must, if it is to ashame, come not from without but from within. If she went, her conscience, she thought, would acquit her. She thought that she would not feel dishonoured, though she knew that she would be disgraced. To refuse on that account seemed to her selfish. As a result finally she consented. Yet in consenting she made one stipulation. Characteristic in itself, it was that there must be nothing clandestine, that he must come for her in the rue de la Pompe, and that from there, her boxes put on whatever vehicle he brought, they would leave for darkness by daylight.

The plan pleased Verplank. He agreed at

once. He told her that he would come the next day.

When he had, she added: "To-night I go to the Opéra; the Helley-Quetgens have asked me. It is my last look at this world."

Then, shortly, the arrangements for the evasion completed, she left the hotel.

Without, her motor waited. She told the groom to have it follow her. The air tempted, though the sky was dirty. She thought of the California glare, the eager glitter of New York. She wondered would they go back there. Perhaps, she told herself, we shall at last see Bora-Bora.

Her walk took her through the arcades of the rue de Rivoli to the fountains of the Place de la Concorde. From there she was about to enter the Champs Elysées when she became conscious of being accosted.

"Chère madame," some one was saying, "I precipitate myself to renew the expression of my homage."

D'Arcy, hat in hand, was before her. At once, with a view to what the French agreeably describe as the placing of landmarks—*pour poser des jalons*—he asked to be permitted to accompany her.

Leilah smiled.

"Not for the world!"

She motioned at the motor. Then, with that graciousness which is natural to the mondaine, with perhaps the desire also to attenuate whatever there were of brusqueness in her reply, she added, as she got in the car:

"I shall be at the Opéra with the Helley-Quetgens to-night. Could you not look in?"

D'Arcy, habituated to the abruptest victories, accustomed to inflame, with but a glance, by the mere exhibition of his Olympian good looks, and, therefore, indifferent when not bored by the celerity of his successes, but piqued by the tranquil air with which this woman had always regarded him, thanked her, assured her that he would not fail to be there, and replaced his hat.

Immediately he raised it again, straight from the head, high in the air. Looking with brilliant eyes from a brilliant brougham, Violet Silverstairs was dashing by.

Coincidentally, unobserved but observant, Barouffski was also passing that way.

Leilah's motor flew off and she sank back, wondering at herself, wondering rather what influence, malign and unhallowed, could possibly have prompted her to ask this man, whom she disliked as—in spite of a theory to the contrary—honest women do dislike a man of his type. But though, at the time, she could

not understand what impelled her, later it seemed to her that it must have been fate.

Barouffski had a different interpretation. At the Joyeuses he had seen Leilah and d'Arcy together. Now, here they were again. The circumstance, of which the fortuitousness was unknown to him, irritated him for that very cause. But he could imagine and did. At once it was clear to him that the brute was after the blue eyes of her bankbook. The deduction, however erroneous, was easy. He was viewing the matter, not, as he fancied, from d'Arcy's standpoint, but from his own. In spite of which, or rather precisely on that account, he told himself that d'Arcy was a damned scoundrel. The humour of this quite escaped him. But that perhaps was in the order of things.

Since the night at the Joyeuses, he had been measuring himself solely against Verplank. Twice he had failed with him, but he knew that soon they would be at each other again and for the next bout he had in view a coup which, he felt, would do for him definitely. Meanwhile, if in regard to Leilah he had been led into certain vivacities, he felt that with time, which is the great emollient, her memory of these vivacities would pass. Even otherwise, the law was with him. He pro-

posed to see to it that she was also—she and with her her purse. The one menace to both had been Verplank. Here, now, apparently, was another. Here was d'Arcy with his pseudo-Pheidian air, that famous yet false appearance of a young and dissolute Olympian which made imbeciles turn and stare. Ragingly Barouffski reflected that canaille though d'Arcy were, he carried a great many guns, almost as many as Verplank, who, worse luck, had, in addition, the signal advantage of being Leilah's first love—that love to which it is said one always returns.

But even as he sounded the stupidity of that aphorism, vaguely, for a dim second, he intercepted a gleam refracted from truth. The danger with which he had to contend, Verplank did not personify or d'Arcy either, it was himself. When the golden six was tossed him, had he but then known how to secure the box, there would now be no danger at all. But truth, when it does not console, confounds. Barouffski put it from him. It was too exasperating. "Bah!" he told himself, "if her attitude does not change, a sojourn in the solitudes of Lithuania may alter it." Angrily he nodded. Things more surprising have occurred there.

On this day it was Leilah who surprised him.

Since he had called to her from the garden, she had encountered him only in the hazards of entrances and halls. On such occasions she had passed with an air of being unaware that there were anything save chairs and tables about.

In part, it was this attitude which he thought certain solitudes might change. Oddly enough, Leilah herself wished it altered. But to want to do one thing and to do something else, happens to all of us, even to the best. She despised Barouffski and yet in despising him knew that the one contemptible thing is contempt. For what he had done, she felt that no punishment could be too severe, yet in so feeling she knew that he was only the embodiment of past misdeeds of her own. Physically he had struck her. Spiritually, it was her own hand that had dealt the blow. He had loosed the dogs on Verplank and she had judged and condemned him for it, though she knew that not only she should not judge at all, but that never perhaps do useless events occur. Clearly these events were evil, but were not those which she planned evil too?

In this dilemma there was some slight consolation for her in the knowledge that it was not her fault, at least not her present fault, that she had been born with a nature so prob-

lematic. But the *Vidyâ,* in teaching her that whatever we suffer is derived from our past; that the people who wrong us—or seem to—are mere puppets come to claim karmic debts which we owe; the *Vidyâ,* in teaching her that taught her also that every life we lead here is but a day in school. Her schooling, she felt, had as yet been insufficient. No doubt she would know better when she came here again.

The thin gilt hope of that fortified her a little on this day when, to Barouffski's surprise, she sent for him and then, her head raised, said distantly:

"The Helley-Quetgens have asked us to the Opéra. I am going. You are free to do as you like."

Here, obviously, was something new. At it and at her Barouffski looked with shifting eyes. Uncertainly he rubbed his hands.

"But how then! I am at your orders It is a festival to be where you are."

But as he did nothing without an object, he wondered what hers was. Obviously, there was a reason. Yet, what? Could it be an olive branch? He was too adroit to ask. Even otherwise, he lacked the opportunity. Leilah had gone from the room.

It was in these circumstances that, on this night, she appeared at the Opéra where Violet

was complaining at having seen her with d'Arcy.

At the complaint, Silverstairs pulled at his moustache.

"I did not know that she had taken up with him."

"I don't know that she has either. But she was with him to-day in the Champs Elysées."

"Oh, come now! Things haven't got to such a pass that a woman can't be seen with a man——"

"No, but no honest woman can be seen alone with d'Arcy. Leilah ought to know better. She ought to know better too than to go to the Ritz. As she does not appear to, I propose to tell her."

"Do as you like," replied Silverstairs who would have said the same thing no matter what his wife had suggested. The lady had not entirely Americanised this Englishman but she had at least made him realise the futility of argument.

"Do as you like," he repeated. "There are the Orlonnas. There are the Zubaroffs."

At once to the quick click of an ouvreuse's key, the door opened and Tempest appeared, a foulard showing above his coat.

While he removed these things Violet called at him:

"You're late."

Silverstairs laughed. "He always is. At Christ Church he was known as the late Lord Howard."

Tempest moved forward and sat down between them.

But now, to the volatile sweetmeats of the score, the curtain was falling. In the stalls there was a movement. Men stood up, put their hats on, turned their back to the stage or set forth for a chat with the vestals in the green room.

Silverstairs also stood up.

Violet turned to him:

"I do wish you would look in on the Helley-Quetgens, and ask Leilah to come to luncheon to-morrow. Say I have a bone to pick with her. That may fetch her, if nothing else will."

Tempest ran a hand through his vivid hair.

"A bone over what, if I may ask? You may not know it, but I greatly admire Madame Barouffska."

Violet smiled.

"She's a dear. But I saw her to-day with d'Arcy, and I propose to scold her for it."

Tempest showed his teeth.

"D'Arcy is not a man's man, though he certainly is a woman's. Yet, when you come to that, not such a woman as Madame Barouff-

ska. What an odd thing that was about her first husband!"

"You mean about the dogs?"

"Yes. I never got the rights of it. What was he doing there? Is she living in the past?"

Violet raised her opera-glass.

"She would be very lucky if she could be; living in the present is so expensive, don't you think?"

Again there was a quick click. The door opened. Silverstairs, filling the entrance with his tall stature, reappeared.

"Violet," he began, "the Helley-Quetgens are going on to some dance in the Faubourg, and Leilah wants the three of us to sup with her at Paillard's. What do you say?"

Violet laughed. "I say it will be just my chance." She turned to Tempest. "You will come?"

"Thanks, yes. Isn't that de Fresnoy with the Zubaroffs?"

Silverstairs, without sitting down, raised his glass.

"Yes, and I was just saying, this is the first time since his duel that I have seen him. But what an asinine affair that was! He lunged at Barouffski's neck, Barouffski knocked the foil up and pricked himself on the chin th it. Then Barouffski's surgeon stopped the f

the ground that it might interfere with his breathing. Fancy that! Afterward, in the account given to the press, the surgeon described the prick as an incisive wound in the hyoïdian region, accompanied by a notable flow of blood. Anyone who did not know would have thought that Barouffski had been nearly done for. But that's a French duel for you—a funeral at which everybody giggles."

Tempest looked gravely up at his friend. "What did you have for dinner?"

Suspiciously, Silverstairs considered him.

"Why do you ask?"

"You are so expansive and brilliant."

On the stage, the drama continued, poignantly, beatifically, in a unison of violins and voices that was interrupted at last by the usual stir in the stalls and boxes, by the haste to be going, to be elsewhere, and a defile began; a procession of silken robes, gorgeous cloaks, jeweled headgear, black coats, white ties; a procession that presently filled the subscribers' rotunda, from which, at sight of it, grooms fled, then hurried back, touching their hats, eager and zealous.

Between the columns groups loitered, regarding each other with indulgence, with indifference, at times with a loftiness that put isolating zones about them; and women as-

sumed that attitude which women alone can assume, that attitude of being not only apart from the crowd, but of being unaware of the crowd's existence.

In the centre, Mme. Orlonna, an Italian princess, with a slight moustache and an ancestry that extended to the super-Neronian days of Heliogabalus, stood, laughing and talking, lisping *Bonthoirs* to everybody.

Another princess, a Russian, Mme. Zubaroff, with a young girl at her side, and an escort of blond giants, passed, inclining her head to the left, to the right, bowing with a grace mechanical, but sovereign.

Beyond, Leilah appeared, d'Arcy on one side, Barouffski on the other. Her face, ordinarily pale, was flushed, and her manner, usually subdued, was animated. She was laughing, not loudly, but noticeably.

Violet, accompanied by Tempest and Silverstairs, approached. As the men, after saluting the women, greeted each other, Violet tapped Leilah with her fan.

"My dear, I have a bone to pick with you."

Leilah, with a levity that was rare with her, interrupted:

"It is just for that we are going to supper. How will you have it, grilled or deviled?"

"Her ladyship's carriage is at the door," a groom announced, in English.

Another added, in French: "The motor of madame la comtesse is advanced."

"Yes," Violet retorted. "But my bone belongs to a different kettle of fish. Now, you come with me." With a smile, she turned to the others. "We will go in the brougham, and you take the motor."

Stooping, she lifted her train, and the two women, accompanied by the men, followed the groom to the carriage.

There, after seeing them in, Barouffski called:

"To Paillard's, Chaussée d'Antin."

XII

At the glass door, which a chausseur opened, Barouffski stopped, spoke to the man, gave him an order. As the others, conducted by a maître d'hôtel, approached a table, a fat woman in a pulpit charged them, before they were seated, with the use of the silver and the cloth.

Beyond, a band of Bohemians, costumed in crimson, were loosing, with nervous and dirty fingers, whirlwinds of notes. The atmosphere, filled with vibrations, fevered by the fury of the violins, dripped with the scent of flowers, with the bouquet of burgundies, the smell of champagne, the odour of tobacco and food.

At adjacent tables were demi-reps and foreigners, mondaines and clubmen, a sprinkle of the cream of the venal, the exotic and the ultra-chic, whom omnibuses and waiters, marshaled by maîtres d'hôtel, served with the same deference and zeal.

For the Barouffski party, these latter had turned two tables into one, at which Violet Silverstairs occupied one end, Leilah the other. Violet had Barouffski at her right, Tempest at

her left, while Leilah had Silverstairs at her left and d'Arcy at her right, a disposition natural enough and otherwise fortuitous which placed Tempest next to d'Arcy, with Barouffski and Silverstairs opposite.

In the rising storm of the music, Leilah turned to d'Arcy. What she was saying the others could not hear and all, save Silverstairs, who was munching a hors d'œuvre, addressed themselves to Violet.

Presently, in a lull of the gale, Tempest would have tried to talk to this woman who, in abandoning her Madonna air had now the merit of suggesting both the Chimera and the Sphinx, but something in her attitude to d'Arcy prevented. It was not, to employ a vulgarism, that she was making eyes at the man, but she was obviously permitting him to make eyes at her.

D'Arcy was seated, his arms on the table, talking in her face. His plate was empty. A chaudfroid had been served. He had refused it. A mousse had followed. He had refused that also. Over the glasses at his side he had put a hand, It seemed a pose of his not to eat or to drink that he might do nothing but talk.

Leilah herself had not eaten. But as soon as champagne was served she had drunk of it,

she had drunk since and in her manner, in the way she held herself, in the inflection of her voice, there had entered a trace of the excessive which the mondaine avoids. It was this that had deterred Tempest. Moreover she had been laughing and that surprised Violet who, except a little earlier in the rotunda, never, since Leilah reached Paris, had seen her laugh before.

Now, her head drawn back, her eyes half closed, she was gratifying d'Arcy with that look with which a woman can appear not to listen merely but to drink the words, the uppearance even, of the man by whom she is addressed. While perhaps flattering to him, it was too marked for good taste. The others noticed it, but, as is usual in such circumstances, they acted as though they had not.

Barouffski conscious of the impression produced, conscious also of the impressions of the afternoon, leaned forward and said in French:

"But, my dear! You eat nothing!"

Silverstairs, tugging at his moustache, laughed inanely and addressing himself to both Leilah and d'Arcy, threw in:

"If this is a private conversation——"

"What nonsense!" Leilah threw back.

"I was about to say," Silverstairs resumed,

"that if it is a private conversation, I'd like to hear it. If it is not, never mind."

Barouffski, still leaning forward, continued:

"I pray you take a bit of the chaudfroid."

With a movement of impatience, yet otherwise ignoring him completely, Leilah turned again to d'Arcy.

Barouffski was not in a mood to be ignored. The sight of d'Arcy in the afternoon, the man's unawaited advent at the Opéra, his demeanour to Leilah, her attitude to him, the hazards which both seemed to suggest; yet chiefly the precariousness of his own position, the constant effort to appear other than what he was, the consciousness of danger ever present, the obligation to cover irritation with calm, anxiety with banter, these things and the tension of them, fevered and enraged. At the moment he felt like a fiend and looked it. A moment only. Reacting at once, he compressed his lips, parted them and summoning his ambiguous smile, called out:

"If the chaudfroid says nothing to you, will you not try the mousse?"

Leilah was raising a glass to her lips. She looked over it at him and, much as though he were a servant, said:

"Do me the favour to attend to your own affairs."

Barouffski's smile evaporated. A man with no sense of honour and some sense of humour may go far, provided that he keep his temper. Barouffski knew it but forgot it. With a tone of authority which in the rue de la Pompe he would have ordinarily avoided, angrily he replied:

"Then do me the favour not to drink any more."

Leilah, the glass at her lips, paused, looked over it again, and very gently, almost sweetly, with the pretty air of a spoiled child, nodded at him.

"Only one sip."

She touched the glass with her lips, for a moment held it there, then, offering it to d'Arcy, rather languorously she said:

"Beau sire, will you drink the rest?"

Instantly Violet intervened. "Leilah! Behave yourself!"

"But with delight," d'Arcy was saying.

From Leilah's extended hand he took the glass, raised it, drained it, put it down, looked at her.

Barouffski was looking at him. Quietly, without emphasis, he asked:

"Will you drink mine, too?"

Half rising as he spoke, he had taken his own glass in his hand and with a gesture

which, even as he made it, he regretted, a gesture incited by vibrations which he was unable to resist, he flung the contents at him.

"Barouffski!" Violet indignantly exclaimed.

She glanced about her. At her elbow an omnibus, a lad undersized but stout, stood gaping. Beyond, the Bohemians were storming. At the adjacent table were demi-reps and South Americans. They had not noticed. At this table, Tempest, his teeth visible, was contemplating his host. Silverstairs, tugging at his moustache, was considering Leilah. The latter was looking—and with what a look!—at Barouffski. But no one spoke. A spell seemed to have settled on all. With the idea of doing or of saying something that would break it, Violet turned to d'Arcy.

Delicately, with a coroneted handkerchief, he had wiped his face and was then mopping at his shirt.

Interrupting the operation, he looked up and laughed. "Oh, la, la! The dangers that may be avoided in remaining at home! These are the accidents of restaurant life!"

He laughed again. The laugh humanised and deformed the Pheidian beauty of his face. He bowed to Leilah, bowed to Violet and collectively added:

"Mesdames, I have ceased to be presentable. A thousand pardons. You will permit me?"

In a moment, after another bow, circular this time, a bow which while managing to omit Barouffski, included the rest of the table, he had gone.

"He looks like Keats," said Silverstairs animated by an unconscious desire to second his wife and break the spell which still persisted. Ordinarily he would have taken her and gone. The assault had been as much of an affront to her as it had been to d'Arcy. But to have left the table would have been a reproof to Leilah, whom, in the ridiculous way in which society is organized, he was unable to disassociate from Barouffski.

"Keats!" Tempest, coming to his aid, exclaimed. "I'll lay a guinea you would not know his picture if you saw it."

Amiably Silverstairs tugged at his moustache. "Well, perhaps not. What I meant was that he looks like a poet."

"I don't agree with you," Tempest retorted. "To begin with, there are not any. Besides, latterly there have been but two—Hugo, who looked like a green-grocer, and Swinburne who looked like a bookseller's assistant. Moreover I hate poets, though, as someone said

somewhere, an inability to write in verse can hardly be regarded as constituting a special talent. No, d'Arcy does not look like a poet, he looks like a poet's creation."

"Excuse me," Silverstairs with affected meekness threw out. "And thanks for the lecture."

Tempest nodded. "You're entirely welcome."

He turned to Violet. She was looking at Leilah who was looking at Barouffski. The latter was looking at the fingers of his right hand against which his thumb passed and repassed mechanically. But now, aroused from his reflections by the entire cessation of talk, he glanced about him, summoned a waiter, settled the score. The Bohemians who momentarily had been silent, abruptly striped the air with spangles from their bows.

Violet and Leilah stood up, resumed their wraps, passed on. The men, buttoning their coats, putting their gloves on, followed.

At the door were the eager grooms. As one of them touched his hat to Leilah, Violet turned to her.

"My dear, I cannot thank you for a very pleasant evening. But I will look in on you to-morrow. That bone isn't picked and what's more, now I've got sauce for it."

With Silverstairs and Tempest at her heels, she went to her brougham. Leilah entered the motor.

At the door of the latter Barouffski stood. He raised his hat. Leilah looked at him. She had had, she thought, her last glimpse of the world and this was her last glimpse of him. The sight was so repugnant that she almost sickened and the nausea which she felt, her face expressed.

Barouffski tried to smile but the unconcealed candour of her abhorrence made his lips twitch. Now, though, the motor was starting. As it whirred away, he drew his coat closely about him, turned up the collar and stuck his hands deep in the pockets. There had come to him that odd sensation which homely fancy attributes to someone walking on your grave.

XIII

The next day, Violet, entering the brilliant room, gazed first about it and then at Leilah.

"Aurelia is not here? That's odd. She is simply horrid but so reliable. You don't mind my having told her to meet me?"

Leilah sighed. "I am getting so that soon I shan't mind anything."

Violet, seating herself, nodded vivaciously.

"I call that very fine. But there is something finer. Never mind anybody. Silverstairs now——" and as the lady spoke she summoned a smile feline and Cheshire—"he fancied I would be a good, obedient little wife. Instead of which he is a good, obedient big husband." In entire self-appreciation she exhibited the tip of her tongue and moistened her lips with it. "It takes us, doesn't it? But forgive me, dear, us is perhaps an exaggeration. I am afraid you have made rather a mess of things. Now what are you going to do?"

Without replying, Leilah looked away. During the night she had barely slept. The incident in the restaurant, events that had pre-

ceded it, anterior complications, subsequent developments, these things, like the Bohemians at Paillard's, had stormed at her, attacked her fibres, wrenched her nerves, striating the darkness of her room with variations on the tragedy of her life.

In what manner the affair in the restaurant had terminated, she had no one to inform her but she could readily fancy that shortly d'Arcy and Barouffski would go somewhere and fight, or pretend to, and then return, none the worse and none the better, but with honour satisfied and their names in print.

The entire episode was shameful. But though provoked by her she had not premeditated it. In offering d'Arcy her glass, she had wished solely to display her independence. Subsequently, in going over the matter, she had realised that the wish, while human, had not been nice. Then, a bit conscience-stricken, she had wondered how she could have behaved as she had.

"I did it without thinking," was her immediate excuse. But that, she told herself was untrue. Ever since the duel and the blow and the nightmare that followed, some such wish had been fermenting in her. The wish, reasonable in itself, though in her case unreasoned, persisted, as in certain natures a wish

will persist, until, after the fashion of a constantly recurring idea, the individual becomes so saturated with it that, given the impulse, given less than that, given a vibration, some effect, perhaps wholly atmospheric, and suddenly the idea has solidified into an act, an act noble, degrading or merely banal, according to the influence that produced it, but an act which, whatever its character, has then become inevitable, even involuntary, its constant mental recurrence having exhausted the ability to choose between it and another.

Leilah had thought of this and, in search of comfort, had groped for another excuse. As an Oriental will say: "My body is tired." "My body is hungry," so Leilah decided: "It was my nerves that did it."

But the sophistry displeased her. She knew that she had judged and condemned Barouffski and she knew also that she had no right to do either. The man was clearly a cad, a scoundrel and a brute, yet even though he were these things and worse and more besides, he so became in her eyes merely because her consciousness had evolved to a point higher than his own. Seen from a different angle, she might appear only a shade less reprehensible, and it might be, even equally vile. Moreover, according to the *Upanishads,*

this consciousness of hers and that consciousness of his were fundamentally one. Both had come from the same source. To that source both would ultimately return. They would be fused there, as originally there they had been merged.

At the apperception of that, the curious lines which occur in the *Book of Dzyan* suggested themselves:

"Said the Flame to the Spark: 'I have clothed myself in thee, thou art my image, my body, until that day when thou shalt rebecome myself and others, thyself and me.'"

In the penetrating beauty of the allegory Leilah told herself that she, Barouffski, Verplank, the Silverstairs, the Helley-Quetgens, everybody whom she knew, everyone whom she did not know, all the fillers of space, were sparks of one Flame, the Flame from which they had been formerly emitted and into which they would finally return. That, she felt she must believe, if she were to believe anything. But she felt too that though she did believe it, she believed also that for the present there were sparks better parted than united, as there were also others better united than apart.

On the table before her was a treatise on the Paramitas—which are The Blessed Things.

She looked at it, knowing that what she had done was wrong and what she was about to do was evil. But she felt also that she could not help herself. Whatever the penalty, it was impossible for her to live with Barouffski. Whatever the punishment, it was impossible for her not to live with Verplank. At the moment it seemed to her as though the high fates had set her in a circle from which she could not escape except by the door of death or that of further sinning. At this idea she wondered about Barouffski as, after Verplank's eruption at the Joyeuses, she had wondered about him. She wondered whether in some former existence she had injured Barouffski and whether it were for that reason that she had been led into giving him the power to injure her now. It might be so, she told herself, in which case she ought to bear it. But how could she know that it was so? Yet even though it were and the fact were made clear to her, even then, even too if the certainty of a punishment more poignant than any were shaken in her eyes, still she could not bear it.

"But I ought to," she found herself saying.

These reflections Violet's advent had interrupted.

"What are you going to do?" the lady was asking.

Leilah, unfit at the moment for battle, felt unable to tell. She looked away.

"Nothing, I suppose."

Violet, cocking a belligerent eye, threw out:

"You carry moderation to excess."

Leilah looked up. "What would you have me do?"

"Divorce Barouffski."

"Because he threw champagne about? I hardly fancy I could get a divorce for that."

Militantly Violet whipped off a glove. "Frankly that creature is a criminal. Never, in all my life, have I seen such an exhibition of bad taste. But then, as they say here, bad taste leads to crime—to such vulgar forms of it at that."

"Even so, I don't see how it helps me."

"But he struck you," Violet, more bellicose than ever, exclaimed. "You told me so. What more would you have. But aren't you difficile to-day!" Suspiciously she considered her friend. "You've got something up your sleeve."

"If I have," Leilah, in an effort to parry the thrust, replied, "at least it is not witnesses."

Cogently Violet nodded. "Come to me then. Divorce is the mother-in-law of inven-

tion. If you haven't any witnesses, I'll find something else. I make a specialty of finding things before they are lost."

This programme hardly suited Leilah's book. Again she parried. "Last night—and what a night!—I dreamed I was feasting with the dead. It was so peaceful. It is that that I want. It is peace the very fibres of my being crave."

Here were heights—or depths—where Violet could not follow. With a smile she tacked.

"Before you dreamed your dream I noticed that you wore a very ducky frock."

"It is stained. So am I. The champagne Barouffski threw stained me within and without."

Here were other heights. Readily Violet skirted them.

"I believe I got a drop or two myself. But then I don't mind. It is true I am not a theosophist."

At this, in indignation at herself, Leilah protested.

"Theosophy is primarily a school of good manners. In giving d'Arcy my glass, mine were detestable."

Now they were on surer ground. Wickedly Violet winked.

"Nobody has any manners any more or,

when they do, they have them in plenty and all of them bad."

"If I have an excuse," Leilah continued, "it is that Gulian drove me nearly demented."

Now, Violet felt, they were getting at it. Mentally she girded herself and with an engaging appearance of sympathy, exclaimed:

"A man never does that unless he loves a woman to distraction."

The sympathy, however feigned, did its work. After all, Leilah reflected, why should she not tell what she was about to do? On the impulse she turned.

"Violet, I offered Barouffski half my fortune to free me. His reply was a blow. Apart from that I have no grounds for a divorce, none at least which I can show. Previously there was something between Gulian and me. It has gone. He cares for me still and I care for him. Shortly he is to be here. For a long time I hesitated. But after last night—after the nights and days that preceded it!—it does not seem to me that I need hesitate any more."

Pausing, she drew breath. "Violet, when he comes I am to go with him. Is there a reason why I should not?"

Violet, who had long suspected as much, now at last had nailed it. Cautiously she buckled to.

"No. Not one. On the contrary. There is every reason why you should. Every reason. Particularly as to greet you there will be the disdainful eyes, the lifted skirts, the averted heads, every one of the very slight and very fiendish tortures that are visited on the woman who has gone and done it."

For a second she too paused, then with a war whoop added:

"But you can't do anything of the kind. I won't let you."

"Would you turn from me also?"

"I! Merciful fathers! But I am not the world. No matter what is done in private, the world does not care. The world is very well bred. It never sees anything that was not intended for it. But on the open scandal of scandalous conduct instantly it turns its well bred back. It will turn it on you."

Indifferently Leilah assented. She had examined this phase of the matter. It had not seemed very important.

"No doubt," she replied. "Yet then destiny seldom closes a door without opening another. I told you of my dream. It was a dream of peace. Here there can be none. It may be my karma perhaps. But this," she continued, motioning at the brilliant room, "this is my prison."

She hesitated and a bit lamely concluded:

"It is horrible to be in such a place."

"And worse to be nowhere at all," Violet shot at her. In firing she had sat up. Now, lolling back on the cushions, she enigmatically resumed: "You may be right though. I daresay it is dreadful to be in prison. I daresay it is even worse than you think."

Enigmatic still, she smiled. With another shot, with two at most, Leilah, she told herself, would be routed.

"It is as though I were in a vortex," the latter was saying. "It is as though I were being torn from places where I do not wish to be to others I may not like. But can one argue with a vortex? It is idle even to struggle. Whether you will or you won't, you have to let yourself go."

Lightly, in her most worldly manner, Violet laughed.

"Never in the world! A woman should never let herself go—except in an aeroplane. At a pinch a four-in-hand might do, but——"

At the moment the lady was thoroughly *en veine* and, sure of victory, might have bantered on, but this, Aurelia, ushered by Parker, prevented.

Sharply Violet threw at her: "Where have you been?"

Ignoring Violet, Aurelia nodded at Leilah. "I was here the other day, did they tell you?"

She turned and with blithe impertinence looked her sister up and down.

"Don't be so ordinary as to ask a girl where she has been. If you are inquisitive, ask where she is going, and, if you ask me, I'll tell you. I am going to become——"

"Yes, yes." Violet impatiently interrupted. "We've heard all that. You're going to become a star. I know what kind too—a fallen star."

A fresher smile bubbled about Aurelia's delicious mouth.

"It pleases your ladyship to jest. I am to become the Princess Farnese!"

"Merciful heavens!" Violet exclaimed, turning as she spoke to Leilah. "She'll go in to dinner before me!"

But Leilah who, after a word of greeting to Aurelia, had, from the table before her, taken and reopened the Paramitas, perhaps did not hear.

Violet turned again to her sister. "When did he propose?"

With an air of amused contempt, again Aurelia looked her up and down.

"How antiquated you are! Don't you know that all that sort of thing has gone out?"

"Do you mean that he didn't propose?"

"Of course not. I proposed to him."

"What?"

"He was so coy about it, too," Aurelia, quite as though she were eating sweetmeats, resumed. "He asked me all about my finances, what settlements I would make and whether I would object if he kept a separate establishment. You can't really fancy how coy he was. He quite blushed and stammered, the poor thing."

"I should think he might."

"Yes, indeed. He asked me if I had spoken to his mamma, and I told him that while it was perhaps incorrect of me to speak to him in the first instance, yet that there could be no real love without a mutual misunderstanding, and now that we had one I would make a formal demand of the old lady to-day."

Aurelia, executing a little *pas,* added: "I have just seen her."

"Well?"

"She said: 'And so you want my little boy for your husband.' Partly that I told her, but partly also I want you for mother-in-law. You should have seen her lick her chops over that. Then she asked me about my affections.

I told her they were just like the fashions. They came and went."

"She must have been delighted."

"She hugged me. Then, of course, I asked about him. She told me that he has just been named as co-respondent in the Kincardine divorce suit, and I said that that was perfectly satisfactory."

"What!"

"Perfectly satisfactory. It appears that the poor boy can't remember whether the charge is true or false and that I think is so dear of him."

Violet, rising, extended her arms. "Aurelia, I have been wrong, I have misjudged you. Come to me."

But Aurelia, moving back, waved her away. "You'll only muss me. Now I must run. I must break the news to Parsnips. Will you come, Vi?"

"In a moment." Violet answered. "Wait for me in the brougham. There is something I want to say to Leilah."

Endearingly the ingénue smiled. "Something I ought not to hear, I suppose." In speaking she made for the door. "The amount of things I ought not to hear and do hear is simply amazing."

As the portières fell on her gracile back,

Violet, with a gesture which, for so warlike a lady, resembled defeat, reseating herself, exclaimed:

"Frankly, she is impossible."

At once though, buckling anew for the fray, she aimed at Leilah and fired.

"So are you."

Leilah, who had been considering the Paramitas, started at the attack which instantly was followed up by another.

"Do you know anything about the code here, the law code, I mean. Do you?"

Leilah, a bit bewildered, shook her head. "No, that is, very little."

Violet's eyes fairly snapped. "I congratulate you. A little is sometimes a great deal. I also know a little and that little is, well, immense, so enormous even that because of it I am in a position to tell you that if you go with Verplank, Barouffski can, if he catches you, have you jailed."

Gravely, with curious calm, Leilah looked at her.

Annoyed that the shot had fallen short, Violet aimed again.

"Didn't you hear me? I said jailed. J-a-i-l-e-d! Now I may add for two years. That is what I meant when you spoke of your prison. I agreed with you that it must be

dreadful to be in one. I said I daresay it is even worse than you think."

Leilah half raised a hand. "But——"

Unheedingly Violet continued. "Now, as for Verplank, if Barouffski were to surprise him here with you he could kill you both, yes, and be acquitted. But you—I have told you what he can do. Moreover, if he so much as suspects you, he can call the police. But excuse me. You were saying?"

"Nothing of any moment."

But Violet persisted. "What was it?"

"Merely that during the Terror a woman went to the guillotine smelling a rose."

At this flank movement Violet winced, but she rallied.

"Yes and rehearsed the act beforehand. They all did. The great ladies of the period rehearsed for the guillotine that they might die, as they had lived, with grace. Those were the good old days. These are the bad new ones. Anything of the kind would be ridiculous now."

To this, gravely as before, Leilah assented. "No doubt. But aren't you rather rambling about the grounds? It seems to me that you also have something up your sleeve."

Violet rose to the challenge. "Something! I have the entire pharmacopœia. In it is a

remedy heroic but sovereign. If you'll take it, it may maim but it will cure."

Leilah, well entrenched, braved her. "I may not need it."

With a rush, then, the attack began.

"That's because you don't know. You think you are sane and sound. Don't you now? Yes, and you are neither. You have a high temperature complicated with nausea. The temperature is due to exposure, the nausea to indigestion. You have been exposed to Verplank and you have supped on Barouffski. You fancy you can't be rid of the incubus. That is an hallucination which the fever has caused. You can be rid of it. You can throw it up. I have an emetic that will do the trick. It may not be tasty but I'll warrant it will make him gag far more than you."

At the ferocity of the assault, Leilah quailed. "Really, Violet, your language——"

But the lady was not be denied. "Aha! You want me to be butter-fingered, don't you? Not a bit of it. You shall have the dose whether you like it or not and here it is for you. You called this place a prison. Now who runs it? You do. And on what? Your money. Supposing you hadn't any? Would Barouffski supply it? He would pack in a jiffy. Couldn't

you then sue for divorce? Of course you could. Then there is the emetic. Verplank has enough for you both, enough for an army. All you have to do is to hold your nose, open your mouth, give your money away and vomit Barouffski. Will you?"

It was Violet's last shot. With it she had expected to bowl Leilah completely over. Anxiously she looked to see the result.

"Will you?" she repeated.

With manifest exaltation Leilah answered: "I had thought of it."

Surprisedly Violet stared, wondering could all her ammunition have gone for nothing, wondering too at the almost rapt expression that had come into Leilah's face.

"What?"

"Yes, Violet, I had thought of it—and of other things also. While Aurelia was here, I was reading a little book. It told me what I once knew and had since forgotten. It told me that if we have ideals we should live for them, that it is only by living for them and suffering for them that we can lift ourselves above the brutes. Violet, it was sinful of me to think of going with Gulian."

Dispassionately the now mollified lady toned that phrase.

"It was not perhaps quite nice."

"But I had not seen," Leilah continued. "No, not that," she interrupted herself to explain, "I had forgotten that this prison, all I have endured, all I shall endure, these are my debts to the Lords of Karma."

But that was a bit too strong. Violet laughed.

"You mean the Lords of Gammon."

"I mean," Leilah, with heightening fervour, replied, "that I have looked upon my prison as a cross. It is not a cross, it is a boon—one of which I have not been worthy. For I forgot that any sorrow should be welcomed. I forgot that it has been sent to make us nobler than we are. But my sorrows I have not welcomed. I have rebelled against them. I shall rebel no more. They were my masters. They shall be my servants now."

At these fine sentiments Violet sniffed.

"If that is theosophy I will believe in it when I am old, fat and a German. But I am glad it enabled you to reach a decision. Otherwise——"

But what the lady may have intended to say was never expressed or at least not then. Through the yellow portières, the delicate oval of Aurelia's face appeared.

"Aren't you ever coming?" she called. "What have you two been talking about?"

As the ingénue spoke, she entered, strolled to the mirror, considered herself.

"We have been discussing your engagement," Violet, in a very matter of fact way, replied.

Aurelia adjusted her hat, patted her hair, and addressed the mirror.

"I fancied it must be something important. Did I tell you what happened before I took Farnese?"

Violet yawned. "I have forgotten."

Aurelia, still pluming herself, smiled.

"Then I didn't. Besides, it is so shocking."

Violet motioned at her. "Don't be tiresome. I may have lost the ability to be shocked but not the ability to be bored."

With an air of great satisfaction Aurelia turned.

"Well, this morning, d'Arcy called. He told me about the gayeties last evening and it seemed to me that he must have looked so sweet with the champagne all over him that I could hardly resist accepting him, too."

"Accepting him, three!" Violet exclaimed. She raised her eyes as though calling heaven to witness. "There's constancy for you!"

Aurelia gave another glance at her enticing self.

"Do you know, I have always thought that

constancy must be due either to a lack of imagination or else of opportunity. That is what you would call a moral standpoint, isn't it? Though what morality itself is you never deigned to explain. Personally I am inclined to think that it must be a preference in a choice of experiences."

Violet stood up. "One might suppose you thought it consisted in being engaged to half a dozen men at the same time."

Enthusiastically the girl regarded her. "There! That's it! You've struck it! There is safety in numbers and what a moral young person I am!"

Violet nodded. "I never suspected it before."

"Nor I," Aurelia contentedly replied. She looked at Leilah. "By-by."

"Good-by," Violet added.

In a moment both had gone and Leilah, again alone, reopened the little treatise on the Paramitas.

The way was now clear and to that way the pamphlet had pointed. It had done more. It had brought the exaltation which such beatitudes do bring to those in great distress. But though it had exalted, suddenly the fervour fell from her, for at once she foresaw the scene which she would have with Verplank, when

now, at the last moment, she had to tell him that she could not go. The terror of it daunted her. She could see him, demanding that she tell him why—that faltering why of hers which would be gibberish to him and yet which summarised her ideals.

For the moment she felt that she lacked the strength for this, that it would be better to write him and she was thinking what she would say and how she would say it, when something external, a noise from without, distracted her.

She stood up and went to the window, from which, since the day of the ambuscade, she had had no heart to look.

Below, a footman in a canary coat and black knee-breeches was walking, bareheaded, straight on. At the gate he stopped, fumbled with the latch, drew back the door, held it open.

A man entered. Tall and broad-shouldered, he had a rigid face, calm eyes, the air of a judge. His beard, intensely black, the beard of a Saracen, was close cut and pointed. He was dressed in black.

Another man followed. Shorter, fairer, distinctly fat, he had a box under his arm. About the box were broad bands, sealed with red wax.

A third man appeared. Older than the

others, he had gray hair, glasses rimmed with tortoise-shell, and a bag.

All three were in black, all were grave, all were silent, and as they stood before the gate they partially concealed a fourth man, who, in black also, wore white gloves.

What they had come for Leilah could not imagine. Then, at once, she recalled what Violet had said: the rigors of French justice, a husband's ability to cage an erring wife, to put her away, indefinitely, among the demented and the depraved, and at the sight of these men, at the thought of the Byzantine abysses of Barouffski's nature, abysses perhaps unsounded yet, dread shook her. She shuddered.

But now another procession appeared, one that issued not from the gate, but from the house, a procession also composed of four men, also grave, also silent. One of them she vaguely recalled, and her stumbling memory tried to put a name on him, Dal, Mal, Pal-Palencia! Another, too, she remembered, Tyszkiewicz. A third also, and, to her cost, she knew. It was Barouffski.

In the first procession there was now a fourth acquaintance. The man with white gloves was raising his hat. As he did so she recognised d'Arcy. Then at last she understood, and, lest they should see her, drew back.

Meanwhile the footman had disappeared. From the first procession the man with the umbrella and the man with the box detached themselves. From the second, Palencia and Tyszkiewicz advanced.

For a little, grouped together, they conversed inaudibly, but amply with gestures and movements that included the tossing of a coin.

A pantomime followed. Tyszkiewicz, Palencia and the fat man moved to one side. The man with the umbrella drew with the ferule of it a line on the ground. Then, his head bent, one foot put directly in front of the other, he walked slowly until he had covered a space equal apparently to about fifteen yards. There he drew a second line, straightened himself, turned to Barouffski, who went to that line, while d'Arcy stationed himself at the other.

Immediately the fat man handed his box to Palencia. Palencia looked at the seals, broke them, opened the box, and, going to where d'Arcy stood, presented it. D'Arcy removed a glove, removed his hat, which he put brim upward beside him, and taking a pistol from the box, pointed it at the ground.

Palencia went back, restored the box to the fat man, who presented it to Barouffski. Another pistol was extracted. The fat man moved to one side. The man with the um-

brella placed himself at an angle to d'Arcy and Barouffski. In front of him, at an equal angle, Palencia, Tyszkiewicz and the fat man stood. These the old man with the bag and the fourth member of the Barouffski party joined. The man with the umbrella took out a watch, and held it open in his hand.

"Attention!"

The pantomime had ended. Leilah leaned forward. Of Barouffski she could see now but the back of his head, the back of his tight-fitting coat. But d'Arcy, who stood sideways, his heels drawn together, might have been posing for a photograph.

The sky was leaden. The shrubbery resembled it. From behind an urn a cat appeared. It meowed and vanished. For a moment more there was silence.

The man with the umbrella looked from d'Arcy to Barouffski.

"Messieurs, after I give the command Fire, I will count from one to ten, leaving between each number an interval of ten seconds. It is unnecessary, but it is my duty to add, that to fire before I have given the word, or after I have counted ten, constitutes attempted assassination and, should death ensue, murder."

He paused, looked at his watch, looked at d'Arcy, again at Barouffski.

"Fire!"

Simultaneously the two men raised and extended their right arms, d'Arcy in such a manner that the forearm and butt of the pistol masked the abnormal beauty of his face. The hand was bare, but the left, which hung at his side, was gloved.

"One! Two! Three!"

With the ridiculous noise of a firecracker a pistol went off. D'Arcy, lowering his right hand, raised and shook the left. The delicate material of the glove had reddened, and on the ground specks of crimson dropped.

"Four! Five!"

D'Arcy's left hand fell back. He raised the right.

"Six! Seven! Eight!"

Measuredly, monotonously, but more loudly than before, the final numbers were being called. Infinitesimally the point of d'Arcy's pistol moved. His heels were no longer drawn together. His right hand was held less high. His left hand burned. Otherwise he was entirely at his ease.

He had withstood Barouffski's fire. It was Barouffski's turn to withstand his. He had time and to spare. Slowly, coolly, deliberately, he was taking aim.

It was very agreeable. He was smiling. He

was enjoying himself. He was enjoying Barouffski's presumable suspense. He was savouring his equally presumable agitations. The man's face had turned ashen. The fact that it had, that he could see it had, delighted him. He felt sure of himself, and his thoughts were pleasant.

He was thinking: "That glass of wine of yours was the last you will ever ask me or any one else to drink."

He had become aware of Leilah's presence. That, too, delighted him. If he had a regret, it was that Tempest, the Silverstairs, all the demi-mondaines and exotics of the night before, the Bohemians to boot, the waiters as well, were not present also. Though in appearance divine, at heart he was human.

Again, imperceptibly, the point of his pistol moved.

"Nine!"

The trigger had been pulled. There was a fresh detonation. D'Arcy handed his pistol to the fat man, bent over, took up his hat, put it on, took it off, raised it straight upward, and for a moment, before replacing it, held it high in the air.

Leilah, without noticing the salute which was intended for her, saw Barouffski turn com-

pletely around, sink on his knees, press his hands to his side, and pitch forward.

It was a feint, she thought, histrionics for the gallery, perhaps for her. But now the old man and his colleague were bending over him. Behind them, Palencia, Tyszkiewicz and the man with the umbrella leaned. Barouffski's coat and waistcoat were opened, his shirt was torn apart.

Leilah heard what to her was the meaninglessness of technical terms. She saw the men who had been bending arise. She saw the others remove their hats. At the significant action she saw that the garden had been again invaded, this time by Death.

She turned, clutching for support at the velvet of a curtain, overwhelmed at the knowledge that her prison had crumbled, that the jailer was gone.

It had been her destiny to have sorrow spring into her life, fell her, make her its own, and to what end? Tearfully she had put that query to walls as callous as fate. Tearfully she had come to believe that she was damned in this existence for sins committed in another. It is this life that is hell she had told herself. But now, abruptly, the malediction was lifted. Still in hell, she was at the portals, the gates were open, she was free!

Yet was she? At the moment it seemed to her that it was all a hallucination; that, if she looked again into the accursed garden, she would see Barouffski tapping his breast with one hand, pointing to some prostrate form with the other, and, with his ambiguous smile, calling to her:

"See, my dear, I, I am unharmed."

So poignant was the impression that she did look. A litter had been improvised, and on it Barouffski, an arm pendent, his head fallen back, his face a gray green, was being put.

On the door behind her sounded the muffled tap of fingers furtive and discreet. She turned. At the threshold was Parker.

"If you please, my lady. Will your ladyship receive——"

"No," Leilah answered. She was about to add that she was at home to no one. But she caught herself. "Who is it?"

With that air which those acquire who attend to delicate matters, the woman answered: "Mr. Verplank."

Leilah drew a long breath. She went to the mirror. The curtain had disarranged her hair. She readjusted it, and passed out and down into the slippery salon.

Verplank was leaning against the piano. His left arm was in a sling, and the left side

of his face from the nose to the ear was bandaged.

Before either could speak there came from the hall a murmur of voices, the sound of lumbering feet, the noise of people labouring upward.

Verplank looked at Leilah, and from her to the door.

"What is that?"

On and upward moved the steps, the noise decreasing as they passed, the sound subsiding with them.

"What is it?" Verplank asked again.

Leilah's under lip trembled. The deliverance from the vortex, the after-shudder that comes when some great peril has been barely escaped, the sensation of strength overtaxed, these things fusing with the consciousness that the last barricade had been taken, that there were now no more hostages to joy, induced in her one of the most curious of physical phenomena.

With tears running down her cheeks, she smiled. Then, sobbing and smiling still, she answered him:

"The key of the prison."

Verplank nodded. He did not in the least understand. But the singularity of her appearance, joined to the singularity of her reply, aroused in him a great pity for this wom-

an who had ruined her life, ruined his own, and who then seemed to him demented.

"Pardon, madame la comtesse. Monsieur Palencia and Monsieur Tyszkiewicz ask if madame la comtesse will receive them?"

At the door, behind her, was Emmanuel.

At once another phenomenon occurred. Galvanised by that instinct of form which, when requisite, enables women of the world to banish instantly any trace of emotion, Leilah turned to the footman a face in which the tears had been reabsorbed, and from which the smile had gone.

"Say to these gentlemen that I appreciate and thank them, but that I can see no one."

Emmanuel compressed his lips. He wondered how she knew. There was a great deal occurring in this house that perplexed him. Moreover, Verplank's bandage and sling interested him very much. But, trained to his calling, he bowed and withdrew.

"What do they want?" Verplank asked, memories of his own duel surging at mention of their names before him.

In Leilah's face the tears and smiles reappearing, mingled.

"Barouffski is dead," she answered.

Verplank closed and opened a hand. His mouth opened also. He was sure now that she was crazy.

"Dead! How? What do you mean?"

Leilah made a gesture.

"There, a moment ago, in the garden. D'Arcy shot him."

Verplank started. The definiteness of her reply divested him of his idea concerning her, but it produced another which was also, though differently, disturbing. His eyes blazed. The old scar, the scar on the right side of his face, reddened.

"Who the devil is d'Arcy?"

For a moment he stared. Then, angrily snapping two fingers, he cried:

"In taking you from this damned house today, I had intended to leave a card for him, not a p. p. c. either, one with our address on it and the hours when I would be at home. If there was any shooting going on, I intended to be in it. Now some duffer must interfere."

With a rapid intake of the breath, he considered her. At the moment, he doubted it could be true. Yet her face, with its hysterical blending of joy and sorrow, seemed to certify that it was so. After all, he reflected, however the odour may occur, always the smell of an enemy's corpse is sweet. But, uncertain still, he threw out for clincher:

"Is that what you meant by the key of the prison?"

She moved to him.